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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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K'taka Cabinet clears internal quota for SCs

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

A special meeting of the Karnataka Cabinet on Friday decided on the SC internal quota within the overall limit of 15 per cent of total reservations. Briefing reporters after t, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said the Cabinet decided reservation of 5.25 per cent each for the "right hand groups," and the "left hand group", and 4.55 per cent for other SCs, including nomadic communities. He said the government had intended to provide 17 per cent reservation for Scheduled Castes and seven per cent for Scheduled Tribes. —*PTI*

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Netanyahu says he was treated for prostate cancer

JERUSALEM, 24 APRIL

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu announced on Friday that he was treated for early-stage prostate cancer but delayed the publication of his annual medical report by two months to deter Iran from spreading "false propaganda" against Israel amid the war. He posted on 'X' that he was healthy and in "excellent physical condition," adding that he had a minor medical issue with his prostate that was treated. Prostate cancer starts in the prostate gland, a small walnut-shaped organ located just below the urinary bladder, and is a common cancer among men that is treatable, especially when detected early. — *AGENCIES*

Iran's FM travels to Pak for talks on ceasefire with US

ISLAMABAD, 24 APRIL

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi was heading to Pakistan on Friday, where officials have been trying to get the United States and Iran to convene for a second round of ceasefire negotiations. Iran's state-run IRNA news agency confirmed it. It said he would also travel to Oman and Russia. The trip comes as much of the world has been on edge over a war that has snarled crucial energy exports through the Strait of Hormuz, clouded the global economic picture, and left thousands dead across West Asia. Earlier, two Pakistani officials told The Associated Press that Araghchi was heading to Pakistan with a small government delegation. —*PTI*

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K'taka mandates heat stroke units across hospitals

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

The Karnataka government on Friday directed state-run health facilities to set up dedicated 'heat stroke management rooms' to address risks from extreme temperatures, officials said. In a circular issued, the Commissionerate of Health and Family Welfare Services said community health centres should earmark two beds, taluk hospitals five beds, and district hospitals 10 beds for heat stroke management. The circular, issued under the National Action Plan on Heat-Related Illnesses, stated that these facilities must be made operational every year, including in 2026, from 1 March to 31 July. It also directed all health institutions to establish ORS corners.—*PTI*

Raghav Chadha quits AAP, joins BJP

In major blow, 6 other AAP RS MPs quit and merge with BJP ahead of Punjab polls

BJP President Nitin Nabin meets Rajya Sabha MPs Raghav Chadha, Sandeep Pathak and Ashok Mittal at the party's headquarters, in New Delhi on Friday —*PTI*

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

AAP suffered a major setback on Friday as seven of its Rajya Sabha MPs, including Raghav Chadha, Sandeep Pathak and Ashok Mittal, quit the party and merged with the BJP, citing a drift from its founding principles.

Former cricketer Harbhajan Singh, Swati Maliwal, Rajinder Gupta and Vikram Sahney were among the defectors. The announcement, made at a hastily convened press conference at Constitution Club, marks one of the largest coordinated defections in the Upper House in recent years.

Chadha, a founding member of AAP, said the party had "completely strayed from its principles, values and core morals". Referring to the party's Rajya Sabha strength of 10 MPs, he noted that the defection met the constitutional threshold for a merger, requiring two-thirds of members.

Six of the seven MPs are from Punjab, a state where AAP is currently in power, raising concerns within the party ahead of Assembly elections next year. Party sources admitted efforts were underway to prevent further defections.

> **I feel I was the right man in the wrong party for the last few years. My vision for the country and the direction my former party was taking were no longer aligned**
>
> —Raghav Chadda

Insiders pointed to multiple factors behind Chadha's exit. Starting in 2023, he began withdrawing from active party affairs in both Punjab and Delhi. His prolonged stay in London for eye surgery during the arrest of party chief Arvind Kejriwal in March 2024 reportedly became a point of friction within the leadership.

Chadha was also notably absent during key political moments, including celebrations following legal relief granted to Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia in the excise policy case. He played only a marginal role in the 2025 Delhi Assembly campaign, which AAP lost to the BJP after a decade in power.

Party insiders further alleged that Chadha had been "interfering" in Punjab governance while simultaneously prioritising his individual political profile. . Reports also suggest he sought to distance himself from the Delhi liquor policy controversy and avoid potential legal complications.

Other exiting leaders were also said to be dissatisfied with their diminishing roles within the party. Pathak, the national general secretary, was reportedly sidelined from key electoral responsibilities.

Insiders suggested that the leader who quit feared action by by central agencies such as ED and CBI. The ED had recently conducted searches linked to Mittal in a FEMA probe.

The departures significantly weaken AAP's parliamentary presence. The party now has three Rajya Sabha MPs remaining — Sanjay Singh, N D Gupta and Balbir Singh Seechewal — alongside three Lok Sabha MPs.

Founded in 2012 out of the anti-corruption movement, AAP rose rapidly to power in Delhi and later Punjab. However, after losing Delhi to the BJP in 2025, the latest exodus marks one of the party's toughest political challenges yet. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Oppn moves fresh notice in RS for CEC's removal

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Opposition parties on Friday submitted a fresh notice in the Rajya Sabha seeking to move a motion for the removal of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, alleging "proved misbehaviour".

Sources said Congress leader Jairam Ramesh and Trinamool Congress MP Sagarika Ghose submitted the notice to the Rajya Sabha Secretary General, backed by 73 opposition MPs.

The notice cites "continued partisan asymmetry" in the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct, including the Election Commission's alleged failure to act on complaints against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "address to the nation" on April 18.

Ramesh said the demand for removal was based on "proven misconduct" linked to Kumar's actions since March 15, 2026. He invoked constitutional provisions under Article 324(5) read with Article 124(4), along with Section 11(2) of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, and the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968.

According to the Opposition, nine detailed charges have been framed against the CEC, which they claim cannot be "denied or suppressed".

Ramesh said Kumar's continuation in office amounted to "an assault on the Constitution", adding that it was "shameful" he remained in the post. — *PTI*

DELETED FROM VOTER ROLL

The Supreme Court ruled that having an appeal in progress does not give you the right to vote —*PTI*

SC declines to help 65 WB poll officers

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Friday rejected pleas challenging the removal of several individuals' names from voter lists in West Bengal, including 65 poll workers. The SC directed them to seek a resolution through the designated appellate tribunals. The top court was hearing two separate petitions filed by 71 and six persons, respectively.

The counsel for the petitioners argued that the deletion of their names from the electoral rolls following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise was "arbitrary" as no show-cause notice was issued to the petitioners.

The pleas sought a direction to the Election Commission to permit the petitioners, whose appeals remain pending, to exercise their right to vote in the ongoing Bengal elections. Arguing that the petitioners had already filed their appeals before the appellate tribunal.

However, invoking Article 142 of the Constitution, the court directed the EC that the petitioners' voting rights can be implemented through a revised electoral roll, only in cases where the appellate tribunals dispose of their appeals by 21 April or 27 April.

> **As a citizen of India, I was very happy to see the voting percentage. When people exercise their right to vote, the democratic set-up strengthens,"**
>
> —Surya Kant, CJI, on record WB turnout

The Supreme Court ruled that having an appeal in progress does not give you the right to vote. "It goes without saying that mere pendency of appeals before the appellate tribunals shall not entitle them to exercise their right to vote," the apex court said in its 13 April order. Asserting that "appropriate orders will be passed by the appellate tribunal," the bench said. The first phase of elections in Bengal was held on 23 April, and the second final phase is scheduled for 29 April. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

3 killed in twin firing incidents in Manipur

IMPHAL, 24 APRIL

Three persons were killed in two separate incidents of firing between armed groups of rival tribal communities in Manipur's Ukhrul district on Friday morning, officials said.

In one incident near Mullam village, security forces recovered two bodies around 11.25 am, they said.

The deceased, identified as L Sitlhou and P Haolai, were found in camouflage outfits with bullet injuries, officials added.

Earlier, a heavy exchange of fire broke out between armed militants at Mullam village in the Tangkhul Naga-majority district around 5.30 am.

Armed miscreants set fire to houses in Ukhrul district of Manipur

Some outlying houses in the village were also set on fire by the militants.

Meanwhile, the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust condemned the killing of 'two village volunteers' and the burning of houses at Mullam and Songphal villages.The organisation demanded immediate registration of an FIR and a time-bound investigation into the incident.

In a separate incident, a 29-year-old man, identified as H Jamang from Chatric Khullen in Kamjong district, was killed in an ambush by armed militants near Sinakeithei village in Ukhrul district early Friday morning, officials said adding that the body has been recovered. —*PTI*

10 OF 26 INDIANS FIGHTING IN RUSSIA WAR DEAD, SOME OF THEM WERE DUPED: GOVT TELLS SC

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Ten Indians have died after allegedly being forced to fight in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, the Centre told the Supreme Court on Friday. The bench was hearing a plea to facilitate the safe repatriation of 26 Indians deployed to fight alongside Russian forces.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant, Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi said the situation requires demands 'tactful handling' given the challenges of retrieving bodies from a war zone. Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati represented the Centre.

Petitioners allege their kin were lured to Russia by false job offers, then coerced into combat after their passports were seized. Of the 26 Indians ,Bhati confirmed 10 deaths, one imprisonment, and one voluntary stay.

The Centre said while some individuals were misled, many had entered into "voluntary contracts" with Russian entities. However, the petitioners' counsel refuted the government's claim, saying this is a clear case of human trafficking. The ASG cited "complex human angles" and family-related delays as hurdles to repatriating remains. Petitioners' counsel countered, claiming that the MEA has been unresponsive.

The bench directed the MEA to file a comprehensive status report. —*PTI*

RBI cancels banking licence of Paytm Payments Bank

MUMBAI, 24 APRIL

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday cancelled the banking licence of Paytm Payments Bank for non-compliance with regulatory norms, stating that its affairs were conducted in a manner detrimental to depositors and public interest.

The central bank said it would move the high court to initiate winding-up proceedings. The licence stands cancelled with effect from the close of business hours on Friday, and the bank is barred from carrying out any banking or related activities under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949. The RBI, however, noted that Paytm Payments Bank has sufficient liquidity to repay all its depositors during the winding-up process.

Promoted by fintech firm One97 Communications Ltd, led by Vijay Shekhar Sharma, the bank has been under regulatory scrutiny for several years. In March 2022, it was barred from onboarding new customers due to "material supervisory concerns" and was asked to undertake a comprehensive IT system audit.

Subsequently, in early 2024, the RBI imposed further restrictions, including a ban on accepting fresh deposits, credits or wallet top-ups. Paytm Payments Bank began operations on 23 May, 2017. The RBI said continued operations would serve no useful public purpose given persistent compliance failures. —*PTI*

IN BENGALURU COLLEGE

CET sees row over removal of sacred thread

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

A row has erupted after five Brahmin students were forced to remove their sacred thread at Krupanidhi College in the city during the CET (Common Entrance Test) here with the opposition BJP on Friday flaying the Congress led Karnataka government over the incident.

The BJP came down heavily on the ruling Congress following the incident and called it 'anti-Hindu'.

As the controversy took a political turn, the college suspended the invigilator pending inquiry. The government has also ordered a probe.

The Common Entrance Test (CET) is held to select students for admission into professional courses.

Students on Friday alleged that the invigilators present at the examination hall of the college at Madivala asked them to remove their sacred thread if they wished to write the exam.

Higher Education Minister MC Sudhakar v scans students' faces as they appear for the CET exam in Bengaluru —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

This was despite the fact that last year, when a similar controversy took place, the government had made it clear that the sacred thread would not be removed during the CET.

A student said, 'When I went to the examination centre, the teachers got my ear ring removed. I can still understand that because no metal is allowed, but they also forced me to get the sacred thread removed from the body.'

Left with no other option, the student obeyed the order of the invigilators.

Sources said parents of the students reached the venue of the examination after the exam and questioned the motive behind the action despite the standing instructions against removal of the sacred thread. Karnataka Higher Education Minister M C Sudhakar termed the incident unfortunate. He also said that a review will be conducted to determine strict punishments under the law against those responsible for such actions. —*PTI*

Man dies after bees attack him while climbing tree

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 24 APRIL

A 53-year-old man died after a swarm of bees attacked him while he was removing a large hive from a tamarind tree at Kambathanahalli village under Manchenahalli police limits in Chikkaballapur district. The deceased, Sanaulla, a local honey extractor, had told his wife he would return late after visiting the tree. He reportedly took up the task after a buyer refused to purchase tamarind due to the hive. When he did not return, a search was launched. His slippers were found near the tree, and his body was later spotted hanging at the top. Police and fire personnel took hours to bring it down. Sub-Inspector Punith said he climbed without protective gear; the six-foot hive triggered a fatal attack. *—Salar News*

Two farmers killed by lightning in Bidar

BIDAR, 24 APRIL

Two farmers were killed after being struck by lightning during a thunderstorm in Bidar district, police reported on Friday. The victims have been identified as Revanasiddha, 28, a resident of Navadagi, and Yallalinga, 28, from Jevargi. According to police, the incident occurred in Navadagi village of Bhalki taluk on Thursday evening when both farmers were working in their agricultural fields. "As it suddenly began to rain, the two men took shelter under a mango tree in the field. Lightning struck the same tree, resulting in their death on the spot," police said. Khatak Chincholi police have registered a case in this regard. Police have also cautioned people from taking shelter under trees during thunderstorms. *—PTI*

—ANI

Passenger held at KIA with 2.5kg hydroponic ganja

BENGALURU, 24 APR

A passenger arriving from Bangkok to Kempegowda International Airport was arrested for possession of hydroponic ganja valued at Rs 87.5 lakh, officials said on Friday. The incident occurred on 23 April at T2. "A passenger arriving from Bangkok was intercepted, and 2.5 kg of hydroponic ganja, valued at Rs 87.5 lakh, was seized from his checked-in baggage. The accused was arrested under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act," Bengaluru Customs said . The identity of the person is not yet disclosed, and further investigation is underway. *—PTI*

Minister D Sudhakar admitted to KIMS ICU

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

Karnataka Planning and Statistics Minister D Sudhakar has been admitted the ICU at KIMS Hospital in Electronic City, a statement from the hospital said. The reason was not immediately clear, but news reports suggested that he was first admitted for some other surgery, but then developed complications. The statement said he was responding well to treatment. *—Salar News*

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Cabinet clears internal reservation for SCs

Unanimous decision provides 15% for SCs and 3% for STs

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah with Home Minister G Paramashwara, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil and others on Friday *—X/@HKPatilINC*

The Karnataka Cabinet on Friday cleared the SC internal quota within the overall limit of 15 per cent of total reservations after a special meeting.

Briefing reporters after the meeting in Bengaluru, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said the Cabinet decided reservation of 5.25 per cent each for the "right hand groups," and the "left hand group", and 4.55 per cent for other SCs, including nomadic communities.

He said the State government had originally intended to provide 17 per cent reservation for Scheduled Castes and seven per cent for Scheduled Tribes. However, due to a court order, it has been reduced to 15 per cent for SCs and 3 per cent for STs.

Siddaramaiah announced that, following this decision, the major roadblock to filling government vacancies has been removed.

"From tomorrow onwards, the recruitment process will begin with the issuance of notifications," the CM said.

Flanked by his Cabinet colleagues, Siddaramaiah said there were no differences of opinion among the Dalit ministers during the meeting and that the decision was unanimous. The ruling Congress had promised internal reservation for SC communities in its 2023 election manifesto, and Siddaramaiah said the party had delivered on its promise.

Providing background, Siddaramaiah said that the State government formed a single-member commission was formed under the chairmanship of retired Justice Nagamohan Das after the Supreme Court ruled that internal reservation can be taken up by respective states

> Siddaramaiah said that the final hurdle to filling the pending vacancies has been cleared and that the Congress has fulfilled a promise from its manifesto

The report suggested providing 6 per cent 6 per cent and 5 per cent reservation for the right, left communities of the Scheduled Castes and other nomadic castes respectively. A total of 24 per cent i.e. 7 per cent for ST and 17 per cent for SC communities were reserved for the Scheduled Castes. Thus, a total of 56 per cent reservation was given. However, as the apex court ruled that reservation cannot exceed 50 per cent, the per cent for each community has been reduced slightly.

—Salar News with agencies

Mangaluru to start water rationing on 1 May

MANGALURU, 24 APRIL

Water rationing will begin in Mangaluru on 1 May to address rising summer demand, said Darshan HV, Deputy Commissioner and Administrator of Mangaluru City Corporation (MCC) on Friday. Water supply will be proactively regulated to ensure all wards receive water at least once every two days.

Darshan explained that existing reserves at Thumbe and AMR dam are sufficient to meet drinking water needs until 10 June. Despite this, precautionary rationing has been deemed necessary for the summer.

Water will be supplied to Surathkal areas and Mangaluru city on alternating days. Fringe areas such as Krishnapura, Katipalla and Dambel, which face pressure-related supply issues, are expected to benefit from the regulation, as are high-demand areas such as Surathkal.

Authorities have currently refrained from disconnecting illegal connections on humanitarian grounds. *—Agencies*

Priyank slams BJP, JD(S) for 'mocking Kalaburagi students'

KALABURAGI, 24 APRIL

Kalaburagi district-in-charge Minister **Priyank Kharge** on Friday lashed out at the BJP and JD(S) for allegedly insulting the students of Kalaburagi after the SSLC Exam–1 results were announced on Thursday.

While coastal districts once again secured the top positions, Kalaburagi district ranked last. However, it has shown a significant improvement in results compared to previous years.

Yet, the State BJP's X handle mocked Priyank, calling him a "great intellectual" and said that "Even in defeat, (Kalaburagi has) a perfect record."

In response, Priyank posted: "If you have a problem, criticise me—but why mock the children of Kalaburagi?"

He said that while the district's pass percentage may be around 85 per cent, the results are better than the previous academic year. "But the BJP is insulting the children of Kalaburagi, demonstrating its political and moral bankruptcy."

He further questioned whether the BJP would label the children of its own leaders and workers in Kalaburagi district as "dull."

The BJP hit back, saying it was criticising the Kharge family's governance, and not the students.

Similarly, the JD(S) said that Kharge family has pushed Kalaburagi into "educational darkness" as Priyank has failed in providing good education for students. Priyank hit back, accusing the JD(S) of being number one in "raping men and women". *—Salar News*

Girl dies by suicide for scoring low marks in SSLC

MYSURU, 24 APRIL

A 16-year-old died by sucide by hanging self at her residence upset over scoring low marks in SSLC exam at Kurahatti village in Nanjangud taluk on Thursday. According to the police, the deceased is Trishala, daughter of Shivakumar M. She was studying in Gurumalleshwara Private High School in Nanjangud and expected distinction marks but scored first class marks of 440 in SSLC. She died when residents house were out. *—Salar News*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

'EASE AIRPORT NORMS'

Height restrictions hurting City's growth: DKS to Rajnath

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday met Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, urging a review of height restrictions imposed within a 20-km radius of defence airports in Bengaluru, thereby, hampering the City's vertical growth.

Bengaluru has four operational airports, two of which are defence airbases -- HAL Airport and Yelahanka Airbase.

Authorities seeking construction permits on their premises are required to obtain a No Objection certificate (NOC) from these airport authorities.

Shivakumar pointed out that while GSR 751 (E) restricts building heights to 150 metres only up to a 15-km radius around defence airports, the concerned authorities have been enforcing the same limit up to 20-km, effectively substituting the rules prescribed under the notification.

He said this amounts to bringing an additional 78 per cent of areas, falling within the 15-20 km radius, under height restrictions that go beyond what the rules mandate.

Shivakumar warned that curbing vertical development in the City's core would push growth outward in an unplanned manner, undermining the state government's efforts to ensure systematic urban expansion. Shivakumar also sought early approval for land transfer required for the ramp near Hebbal to build the Twin Tunnel project and approval for land for the Elevated Rotary Flyover at IOC Junction. He is likely to meet more Union Ministers soon. *—Salar News*

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh meets with Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, in New Delhi on Friday *—PTI*

JAYADEVA TO OPEN 100-BED CARDIAC UNIT IN WEST BENGALURU

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

The Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research (SJICS&R) on Friday signed an MoU with the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) to establish a 100-bed Jayadeva satellite unit at Govindarajnagara in west Bengaluru.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's recent budget allocated Rs 15 crore as an immediate measure. The agreement was formalised between Jayadeva director Dr B Dinesh and GBA Chief Commissioner N Maheshwara Rao at Vikasa Soudha, a statement said. Medical Education and Skill Development Minister Dr Sharanprakash R Patil, MLA Priya Krishna, Additional Chief Secretary Mohammed Moshin, West Mahanagara Palike Commissioner KV Rajendra and others were present.

Patil said the unit will aid residents of Vijayanagar, Rajajinagar, Yash wanthpur, Rajarajesh warinagar, Dasarahalli, Peenya, Bengaluru Rural and neighbouring districts, offering treatment at no or minimal cost.

The facility is expected to ease the burden at Jayadeva's Jayanagar hospital, which also runs units in Kalaburagi and Mysuru.

Patil and Krishna also directed officials to identify five acres of government land in the region to establish a new campus of Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute (BMC&RI). *—Salar News*

ZERO SHADOW DAY

Children take part in a 'Zero Shadow Day' event at Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium, in Bengaluru, on Friday. On the day, vertical objects cast no shadow when the sun is directly overhead *—Mohammed Asad*

MP visits hospital after ants 'kill' baby

MYSURU, 24 APRIL

Mysuru-Kodagu MP Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar visited the Cheluvamba Maternity and Children's of Hospital following allegations that a newborn baby died of ant bites in the hospital.

A premature newborn baby died in the Mysuru hospital on 17 April.

People protested outside the hospital on Thursday, alleging medical negligence. The parents alleged that the baby was bitten by ants during treatment at the ICU ward, and subsequently died.

The baby had been born on 15 April when the mother, Neela, was just seven months pregnant. Due to the early delivery, the baby weighed just 1.4kgs and was admitted to the ICU.

Notably, doctors at the State run maternity hospital have said that the baby died due to infection and jaundice.

Speaking to Salar, Dean and Director of Mysuru Medical College and Research Institute Dr KR Dakshayini said that the autopsy was conducted on Friday and action will be taken after the report.

Yaduveer while at the Cheluvamba hospital, asked Dr Dakshayini to prepare a list of items that the hospital required. *—Salar News*

MP Yaduveer made an inspection visit to Cheluvamba Maternity and Children's Hospital in Mysuru on Friday *—Salar*

Shivamogga girl dies in freak cloth swing accident

SHIVAMOGGA, 24 APRIL

A nine-year-old girl died after a cloth swing tightened around her neck while playing at home in Shivamogga on Friday. The deceased has been identified as Pranamya from Vidyanagar in Shivamogga.

Reports state, the child was visiting her aunt's home in Lakkinakoppa village.

It is said that after being teased by her cousins, she locked herself inside a room and began playing on a makeshift cloth (panche) swing. During which, the cloth allegedly tightened around her neck, suffocating her.

The girl had already succumbed by the time her family opened the door. Preliminary information suggests asphyxiation as the cause of death. Further details on the case awaited. *— Salar News*

90-DAY FREE SUPPORT

Govt, Naukri.com ink hiring deal for GCCs

BENGALURU, 24 APRIL

The State government, through the KITS (Karnataka Innovation and Technology Society), has entered into an MoU with Naukri.com, to provide support the in the initial stages of setting up the Global Capability Centres (GCCs) in the State.

The KITS-Naukri.com, a business division of Info Edge India Limited, tie-up is expected to provide the support by facilitating structured access to high-quality talent solutions, with a particular focus on regions beyond Bengaluru, including Mysuru, Mangaluru, Hubballi-Dharwad-Belagavi, Kala buragi, Tumakuru, and Shivamogga, officials said on Friday.

Naukri.com will extend a customised GCC starter package to newly established GCCs registered with KITS, offering zero-cost access for an initial period of 90 days by way of providing employer branding, assisted hiring services, and premium talent sourcing tools designed to enable GCCs to build capable teams during their foundational phase rapidly, a company statement said.

Minister for Electronics, IT, and Biotechnology Priyank Kharge said, "Karnataka's strength in the GCC ecosystem is driven by the depth of our talent pool and the strength of our innovation ecosystem."

The MoU is effective for a period of two years. The KITS, through the KATALYST cell, will facilitate awareness of incentives for eligible GCCs, while Naukri.com will ensure seamless onboarding, training, and ongoing support during the incentive period, the statement said.

Meanwhile, Japan's Onestruction Inc, a construction technology company, and DataKaveri Systems, the commercial entity of IISc Bengaluru's Centre of Data for Public Good, have signed an MoU to establish a framework for strategic and collaboration in urban and built environment data exchange. *—PTI*

Cong responsible for terrorism: MLA

MYSURU, 24 APRIL

Mysuru BJP District Yuva Morcha activists held a protest near Gandhi Square on Friday, against AICC President Mallikarjuna Kharge for his "terrorist" remarks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Speaking at the protest, Krishnaraja MLA Srivatsa said that Congress was responsible for the growth of terrorism in the country. He said the party is soft on terrorism due to its appeasement politics.

The MLA also alleged that the State government was not releasing grants to his constituency because he "exposed scandals of Mysuru Urban Development Authority involving CM Siddaramaiah and his family members". Claiming that only Rs 25 crore had been released, he described the Congress as "vindictive". *—Salar News*

—WIKIPEDIA

Centre allots Kejri Type-VII bungalow in Lodhi Estate

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Arvind Kejriwal, former Delhi Chief Minister and AAP leader, has shifted to a Type-VII government bungalow at 95, Lodhi Estate, allotted by the Centre, the party announced. Kejriwal stated on X that the court had recently directed the government to allot him the house, considering his role as the national convenor of AAP. He confirmed he had moved in with his family. The bungalow was allotted last October after the Delhi High Court criticised the Centre. Previously, Kejriwal lived on 6, Flag Staff Road, Civil Lines, before stepping down in September 2024, when he moved into a bungalow allotted to AAP MP Ashok Mittal. *—PTI*

Gunmen kill Cong leader's son in Chhattisgarh

CHHATTISGARHJANJGIR, 24 APRIL

In Chhattisgarh's Janjgir-Champa district, three masked men on a motorcycle entered the home of Congress leader Sammelal Kashyap around 12.30am and opened fire, killing his 19-year-old son Aayush Kashyap and injuring his younger brother Ashutosh, 16. Aayush died instantly from two gunshot wounds to the chest, while Ashutosh was shot in the hand; his condition is stable. The incident remains under investigation with a massive manhunt underway, barricades set, and CCTV footage being examined. Ashutosh recounted that the attackers demanded money and mobile phones, and after firing, locked the rooms before fleeing. The motive behind the killing is currently unclear as authorities probe all angles. *—PTI*

India's Army Chief inducted into US Hall of Fame

WASHINGTON, 24 APRIL

India's Army Chief, General Upendra Dwivedi, has been inducted into the US Army War College's International Hall of Fame in Pennsylvania, becoming the third Indian Army Chief to receive this honour. The Indian Army stated that Dwivedi, a distinguished fellow, was inducted during his US visit, where he also addressed faculty and international students on leadership and security dynamics. Earlier, he toured facilities, participated in academic discussions, and reviewed scholar projects. The Army Chief began his US tour in Hawaii, where he met US Army Pacific leaders and took an aerial tour of Oahu. His visit aims to strengthen India-US defence cooperation amid recent high-level exchanges. *—PTI*

Sena leader flays Marathi exams for auto drivers

MUMBAI, 24 APRIL

Shiv Sena's Sanjay Nirupam has appealed to Maharashtra's government to reconsider mandatory Marathi exams for autorickshaw and taxi drivers, urging a more compassionate approach. In a letter to Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik, Nirupam argued that respect for the language should not come with fear or hardship. He said enforcing exams could harm drivers who speak broken or working Marathi, threatening their livelihoods. Nirupam highlighted that most drivers in Mumbai are from Gujarat, North India, Punjab, or South India, supporting their families through hard work. The decision to make Marathi speaking mandatory from 1 May has sparked protests, with trade unions threatening agitation. Nirupam warned that the move could cause fear and disrupt Mumbai's transport. *—PTI*

AAP seeks disqualification of 3 RS MPs

After AAP MPs switch sides to BJP, NDA now 18 members short of two-thirds majority in RS

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

AAP on Friday moved to disqualify three of its Rajya Sabha MPs — Raghav Chadha, Ashok Mittal and Sandeep Pathak — after they join BJP, intensifying a political confrontation following the defection of seven MPs.

AAP leader Sanjay Singh said he would write to the Rajya Sabha Chairman seeking their disqualification under the anti-defection law. In a post on X, Singh argued that by joining another party, the MPs had "voluntarily given up" their membership of AAP, invoking provisions of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution.

The party accused the BJP of orchestrating an "Operation Lotus" to engineer defections and destabilise the AAP government in Punjab ahead of Assembly elections next year.

Clockwise from top left: Raghav Chadha, Sandeep Pathak, Ashok Mittal, Swati Maliwal, Harbhajan Singh, Vikram Sahni and Rajendra Gupta *—PTI*

Party sources said they were on guard to prevent further exits.

Addressing a press conference, Singh described the move as a "betrayal", warning that the people of Punjab would not forgive the defectors. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann echoed the charge, alleging that the BJP was attempting to break the party after failing to find fault with his government.

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal also accused the BJP of betraying Punjab, while senior leader Manish Sisodia said the MPs had "bowed" to the BJP out of "fear, greed and personal compulsions". "Punjab never forgives traitors," he said.

The party further alleged that central agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate (ED) were being used to create pressure on its leaders. AAP national media in-charge Anurag Dhanda pointed to recent raids on one of the MPs, claiming they were part of a broader strategy to force defections.

Meanwhile, the BJP hit back, saying AAP was in "complete disarray" and had turned into a "den of corruption". Party leaders said the developments reflected internal cracks within AAP rather than any external influence.

The defection of seven AAP MPs has also altered the arithmetic in the Rajya Sabha. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) now has the support of 145 members in the 244-member House, still 18 short of the two-thirds majority mark of 163 required to pass constitutional amendments.

The BJP's own strength is set to rise to 113 once the Rajya Sabha Chairman approves the merger of the AAP parliamentary group into the party. At present, the BJP has 106 MPs. With the likely backing of seven nominated members and two Independents, the ruling party's support could reach 122 — the halfway mark in the Upper House.

Despite the gains, the NDA remains short of the numbers needed for key legislation. It also lacks a two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha, where it would require 363 MPs. The recent defeat of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill on women's reservation underscored this challenge.

The seven AAP MPs who switched sides are expected to receive approval for merger under existing rules, as they constitute more than two-thirds of the party's Rajya Sabha strength. *—PTI*

Stalin meets with DMK candidates

CHENNAI, 24 APRIL

Chief Minister MK Stalin on Friday met DMK candidates a day after Tamil Nadu voted enthusiastically recording 85.15 per cent voting.

He interacted with the candidates from Chennai, Kancheepuram and Tiruvallur districts at the DMK headquarters 'Anna Arivalayam' here regarding the unprecedented voter turnout on 23 April, a party source said.

Stalin, who is the president of the DMK, is likely to go on a short trip with his family to Kodaikanal on 25 April. He had hectically campaigned for the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance during the month-long campaign.

His son and Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi had left for Dubai along with his family for a short vacation.

Sustaining the pitch raised during the Assembly election, the BJP candidate from Mylapore Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan accused Stalin of not holding local body elections.

"But as the leader of the opposition he had demanded the conduct of local body elections on time," she said in a post on the 'X'.

Tamil Nadu recorded a voting percentage of 85.15, its highest ever, on Thursday when elections were held to 234 Assembly seats, with Karur and Salem districts topping the charts with over a 90 per cent turnout, according to EC figures. *— PTI*

HC rejects Pawan Khera's anticipatory bail plea

GUWAHATI, 24 APRIL

The Gauhati High Court on Friday rejected the anticipatory bail petition of Congress leader Pawan Khera in connection with his allegations that Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife possessed multiple passports and undisclosed properties abroad.

The single bench of Justice Parthiv Jyoti Saikia rejected Khera's application filed on Monday after the Congress leader was asked by the Supreme Court to approach the Gauhati High Court.

Following the allegations made at a press conference, the CM's wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, filed criminal cases against Khera at the Guwahati Crime Branch Police Station under BNS.

The judge, in his order, pointed out that the petitioner had claimed that the accusations he had brought are based on certain documents, which he has in his possession, while the police claimed those documents were already proven to be false.

After the case was filed, the petitioner had not made any assertion that the police had made fabricated claims, the court said. "The claim of the Advocate General that the case of the petitioner falls within the category of the possession of forged documents or electronic records (Section 339 of the BNS) seems to have force in it," the judge said.

"If Khera had raised those charges against the chief minister, the matter would have been political rhetoric. But in order to gain political mileage, he has dragged an innocent lady into the controversy," the order stated. *— PTI*

My vote cast by someone else: Proxy voting mars WB polls

KOLKATA, 24 APRIL

A tensed atmosphere prevailed during the West Bengal Assembly elections in Siliguri in Darjeeling district on 23 April, as allegations of proxy voting emerged in several pooling booths.

The controversy surfaced at Jagadish Chandra Vidyapith, Booth No. 26/237, where **Kajal Das**, a first-time woman voter claimed that her vote had already been cast before she could exercise her franchise. Her father backed the allegation, raising concerns of impersonation and electoral malpractice.

"I was so excited to vote, but I was informed that my vote had been cast and there

was another person by my name in the constituency. Having two persons with similar names is no excuse for barring me from exercising my right to franchise," a distraught Kajal said.

"I had gone to the polling station to cast, but I was told that my vote had been cast and to come later. How is that possible? I should be allowed to vote as every single one matters," said a male voter.

In Rajganj, Belakoba Babupara, Booth No 18/70, a female voter was shocked when she was informed that her vote had been cast through a ballot. "I am not a government official on duty here, how was my vote cast earlier?" she questioned.

Meanwhile, BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari on Friday alleged that a BJP worker was intimidated and threatened at her residence in South Kolkata by ruling TMC supporters, and demanded immediate action from the Election Commission of India. *— Salar News*

TMC's jungle raj nears end: PM

KOLKATA, 24 APRIL

Prime Minister Modi sharpened the BJP's pitch for regime change in West Bengal, claiming that the first phase of polling has sealed a "wave of change" in the state and signalled the beginning of the end of the TMC's "maha jungle raj."

Addressing a poll rally at Panihati in the Dum Dum Lok Sabha constituency in North 24 Parganas district on Friday, Modi described the high voter turnout as an endorsement of the BJP's campaign for change and a rejection of the TMC's "dictatorship".

Nearly 92 per cent of the 3.60 crore electors voted in the first phase of the West Bengal Assembly polls on Thursday.

In a speech loaded with symbolism around democracy, freedom and political transition, Modi accused the TMC of having "crushed the

PM Narendra Modi tries his hand in photography during a boat ride on Hooghly River in Kolkata *—PTI*

temple of democracy" in Bengal and said voters had begun rebuilding it through ballots.

Claiming that the TMC was "rattled" by Thursday's voter turnout, Modi alleged that the TMC had activated its "goons" to intimidate voters.

Seeking to cast the election as a larger ideological battle, Modi invoked Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and said Bengal needed a "new revolution."

About BJP's women candidates, mother of the RG Kar hospital rape-murder victim and a survivor from Sandeshkhali, Modi said the party had given representation to those who had faced injustice. *— PTI*

'Polls are about resisting attempt to weaken WB'

KOLKATA, 24 APRIL

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee cautioned against forces trying to "impose their divisive agenda" on West Bengal, and asserted that this assembly election is about resisting a systematic attempt to "weaken" the state and control it.

Mamata, who has been addressing poll rallies since last month, said in a post on X that every attempt to "undermine" Bengal will be met with a decisive democratic pushback.

"Those sitting in Delhi, plotting to snatch Bengal's rights and impose their agenda, should understand it clearly that the people of Bengal are watching, and they will respond through their vote. This election is about resisting a systematic attempt to weaken Bengal and control it," the TMC supremo said.

Mamata referred to sustained camapging by the BJP. *— PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi could enjoy a boat ride on the Hooghly because its waters were clean, unlike Yamuna in Delhi

-West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee

EC suspends Hingalganj poll officer for 'bias'

KOLKATA, 24 APRIL

The Election Commission ordered the suspension of the officer-in-charge (OC) of the Hingalganj police station in North 24 Parganas district after allegations that he was acting in a partisan manner.

In a communication to West Bengal Chief Secretary Dushyant Nariala, the EC said it had examined a report sent by state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Manoj Agarwal on 21 April regarding complaints of bias and an alleged nexus between the OC and "local elements." *—PTI*

AFTER US REPORT CALLS FOR SANCTIONS

We are not Hindu supremacist: RSS to US

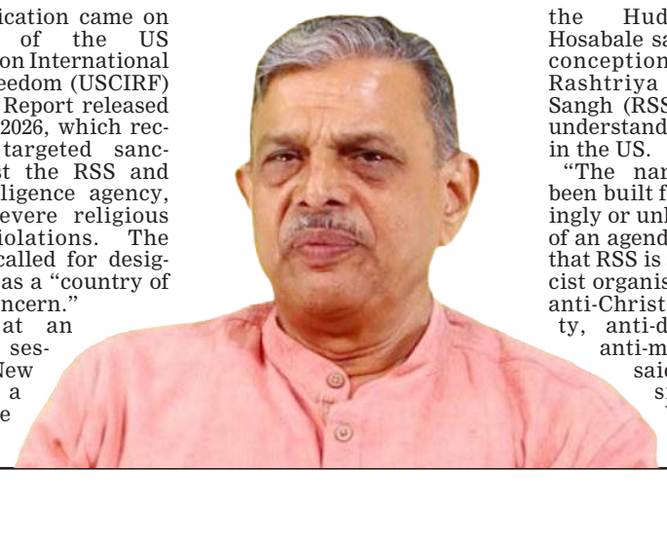
WASHINGTON, 24 APRIL

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale, highlighting the organisation's work across different spheres of society here at a gathering asserted that the RSS is not an Indian version of the Ku Klux Klan, the American White supremacist group.

The clarification came on the heels of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2026 Annual Report released on 4 March, 2026, which recommended targeted sanctions against the RSS and India's intelligence agency, RAW, for severe religious freedom violations. The report also called for designating India as a "country of particular concern."

Speaking at an interactive session at the New India Conference organised by the Hudson Institute, Hosabale said there are misconceptions about the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) similar to misunderstandings about India in the US.

- "The narrative that has been built for decades, knowingly or unknowingly as part of an agenda or otherwise, is that RSS is a Hindu supremacist organisation or that it is anti-Christian, anti-minority, anti-development and anti-modernisation.So what is pro is not highlighted; instead, the anti has always been propagated," Hosabale said during a discussion with author Walter Russell Mead



"The narrative that has been built for decades, knowingly or unknowingly as part of an agenda or otherwise, is that RSS is a Hindu supremacist organisation or that it is anti-Christian, anti-minority, anti-development and anti-modernisation," he said during a discussion with author Walter Russell Mead on Thursday.

"So what is pro is not highlighted; instead, the anti has always been propagated... some Indian version of the Ku Klux Klan, which we are not," Hosabale said.

He said Hindu philosophy and culture view the whole world as one family and do not endorse supremacy.

Hosabale described RSS as a volunteer-driven movement rooted in India's cultural and civilisational ethos. He said the RSS views Hindu identity as a civilisational, not religious, identity. "Through these one-hour gatherings, called shakhas, we inculcate values of life," he further explained.

"Tensions with minority groups and neighbouring countries stem from political interests and wrong interpretations of history," he said, adding that ongoing dialogue with minority communities was key to resolving misunderstandings.

He also addressed Indian American diaspora. *— PTI*

BJP govt wins trust vote in Bihar Assembly

Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary in Bihar Sssembly after winning the vote of confidence *—PTI*

PATNA, 24 APRIL

The Samrat Choudhary-led NDA government in Bihar won the vote of confidence in the assembly on Friday.

Choudhary moved the motion, proposing that "the House reposes its trust in the current council of ministers in the state," during a one-day special session.

The motion was passed by a voice vote in the 243-strong House, where the BJP-led NDA enjoys a brute majority with 202 seats.

Choudhary became the first BJP leader to head a government in the state earlier this month following the resignation of JD(U) president Nitish Kumar, who gave up the top post upon getting elected to the Rajya Sabha.

Only two JD(U) leaders, Vijay Kumar Chaudhary and Bijendra Prasad Yadav, were inducted into the new cabinet and designated as deputy chief ministers.

Besides the JD(U), the BJP-led coalition includes LJP(RV) of Union minister Chirag Paswan, HAM headed by Union minister Jitan Ram Manjhi and RS MP Upendra Kushwaha's RLM. *— PTI*

R'sthan Assembly searched after bomb threat

JAIPUR, 24 APRIL

A bomb threat at the Rajasthan Assembly prompted a thorough security search, though no suspicious objects were found, police reported. The email warned of a suicide attack at 1pm, claiming two attackers with explosive belts would carry out a blast. Jyoti Nagar SHO Santara Meena said police, bomb disposal, and dog squads conducted an extensive search and deployed civil defence volunteers. A similar threat email was received on 13 April, but nothing suspicious was identified then. Authorities are investigating the source of the threats amid heightened security across key government and public sites, including courts, stadiums, and hospitals, as threats continue targeting many sensitive locations in Jaipur. *—PTI*

Minor leaves foetus in toilet, claims sexual assault

NAHAN, 24 APRIL

A foetus was discovered in the bathroom of a government hospital in Nahan, Himachal Pradesh. Officials stated on Friday that hospital CCTV footage indicates a minor—who was allegedly sexually assaulted—had miscarried at Rajgarh Civil Hospital in Sirmour district on Wednesday. The case surfaced after a sanitation worker found a 'suspicious object'—later confirmed to be a foetus—in a toilet, prompting the hospital to alert police. According to the probe, the girl went to the hospital with complaints of abdominal pain. She subsequently suffered a miscarriage in the bathroom, after which she left. During questioning, the minor girl alleged that a man had sexually exploited her. Police have registered a case against the accused and launched a probe. *—PTI*

Mundathikkode fireworks blast toll rises to 15

THRISSUR, 24 APRIL

Search operations at the site of the deadly fireworks explosion in Mundathikkode recovered more human remains, police confirmed. A team involving police and cadaver dogs found an additional five body parts, raising the total recovered to around 132, which are now at Thrissur Medical College for DNA testing. The explosion on 21 April killed 15 people, with four still missing. Police suspect around 38 individuals were present. The search continues as authorities work to identify the victims through DNA matching, while experts handle the remains amid ongoing investigations into the incident in an isolated paddy field area. *—PTI*

—ANI

Nashik cops file FIR against godman Mahesh in sex case

NASHIK, 24 APRIL

Nashik police have registered an FIR against Maheshgiri alias Mahesh Dilip Kakde, 31, for alleged sexual exploitation of a 28-year-old woman. The complaint was filed on Wednesday after activists from the anti-superstition organisation ANS counselled the woman, who faced personal issues. The woman was taken to a mutt in Prati Gangapur, near Lasalgaon, where Kakde claimed divine powers. According to her, Kakde told them she was affected by black magic and asked for rituals. He later sent obscene messages, took her to a Nashik lodge, and exploited her sexually, threatening her with consequences if she complained. Kakde also clicked her objectionable photographs. A case of alleged rape and offences under the Black Magic Act was registered against him late Wednesday. *—PTI*

No court can force minor to carry pregnancy: SC

Pregnant woman's choice more important, says court

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Observing that no court can force a woman, especially a minor, to carry a pregnancy against her will, the Supreme Court allowed a 15-year old girl to medically terminate her over seven-month pregnancy.

Justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan said the choice of the pregnant woman is more important than that of the in utero child and stressed that continuation of such a pregnancy could have long term effects on the minor's mental health, educational prospects, and social standing.

The SC remarked that the reproductive autonomy of a woman must be accorded the highest importance and if a woman, carrying an unwanted pregnancy, is compelled to continue it then her constitutional rights would be breached.

"The right to make decisions concerning one's body particularly in matters of reproduction is an integral part of personal liberty and privacy under Article 21. The right cannot be rendered ineffective by imposing unreasonable restrictions especially in cases involving minors and unwanted pregnancies," the court said.

"It is easy to say that if the pregnant woman is not interested in raising the child she may give away the child for adoption and, therefore, she must give birth to the child. That cannot be a consideration particularly in cases where the child to be born is unwanted. In such a situation, directing the pregnant woman to give birth to the child against her wishes and therefore, continue her pregnancy would negate the welfare of the pregnant woman and make it subordinate to that of the in utero child," the bench said. *— PTI*

The SC remarked that the reproductive autonomy of a woman must be accorded the highest importance *—PTI*

Girl's murder: UP DGP told to set up SIT

The Supreme Court directed the Uttar Pradesh DGP to constitute a special investigation team to probe the case of a four-year-old girl, who was allegedly raped and killed in Ghaziabad last month.

Observing that the victim's parents were dissatisfied with the probe conducted by Ghaziabad police, a bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant said the SIT should be notified preferably on Friday or by 11 am on Saturday.

Justices Bagchi and Pancholi said that the SIT should consist of women police officers and be headed by an IG. *—PTI*

'NO GLORIFICATION OF CRIME'

I&B Ministry asks ZEE5 not to release 'Lawrence of Punjab'

CHANDIGARH, 24 APRIL

The Ministry of I&B advised ZEE5 not to release 'Lawrence of Punjab,' a docu-series on gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, after the Punjab Police expressed apprehension that it posed a risk to public order.

Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring moved the Punjab and Haryana High Court on Thursday, seeking a ban on the release of the web series, claiming it would glorify gangster culture.

When the matter came up in the high court on Friday, Additional Solicitor General of India Satya Pal Jain and advocate Dheeraj Jain, representing the Centre, placed a copy of the communication from the I&B ministry before Chief Justice Sheel Nagu.

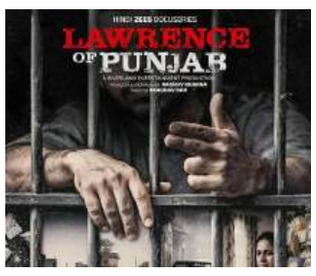
Warring's counsel Nikhil Ghai said their petition was disposed of as their grievance was redressed after the Centre issued an advisory to ZEE5 not to release the docu-series.

The I&B ministry, in a communication to ZEE5 on 24 April, advised it not to release it.

'Lawrence of Punjab' was to be released on ZEE5 on 27 April. According to the makers, the show "traces the journey of a criminal identity through the lens of culture, systems, and visibility" and treats Bishnoi as a case study in the ecosystem of student politics, music, ideology and media amplification.

The OTT platforms were advised to exercise caution before transmission of any film or web series, including biopics and documentaries on gangsters and criminals, which are likely to incite violence, it said.

It pointed out that the Punjab Police said that the content contains dramatized portrayals, real-life footage, and narrative elements which glorify organised crime. *— PTI*



Delhi murder accused had psychopathic traits

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

As crime and forensic teams prepare to conduct scene recreation in the murder of an IRS officer's daughter in southeast Delhi, investigations have revealed that the suspect, Rahul Meena, was notorious for aggressive behaviour in his village, police said.

"During inquiry, we got to know that Meena and his father were known for their aggressive behaviour in their village. Our team is there. They came to know that his father is an alcoholic and Rahul is addicted to online games," said a police source.

Meanwhile, sources said the police will conduct a psychological analysis of the suspect to evaluate his mental state.

Sources said Meena had exhibited psychopathic tendencies and has had a history of violent conduct.

He said Meena was addicted to online betting and card games such as "teen patti" and had lost over Rs 7 lakh, which drove him to borrow money.

He was fired from the victim's house, where he was employed as a domestic help, over theft. However, Meena returned to his village and lied to his parents that he had left the job.

A police officer who interrogated Meena said that he is remorseless and told investigators that "it just happened" in a fit of rage.

Meanwhile, Meena's family claimed that he was a quiet person with "good behaviour" and was good at studies. They denied the rape allegation and claimed that he did not have bad habits except online gaming addiction. *— PTI*

Telangana RTC driver who set himself ablaze dies

HYDERABAD, 24 APRIL

A driver of the Telangana RTC who allegedly attempted suicide on 23 April, died at a hospital here early on Friday, officials said.

Shankar Goud, a 50-year-old driver, allegedly set himself ablaze by pouring petrol at Narsampet in Warangal district when TSRTC employees were staging a protest on Thursday. They have embarked on an indefinite strike over a series of demands from 22 April.

Goud, who suffered serious burns, was initially admitted to a state-run hospital in Warangal and later shifted to a super-speciality hospital in Hyderabad for advanced treatment.

"He died at about 1.30 AM on Friday," a senior official said.

The body of the driver was taken to his relative's village Muttojipet in Warangal district for funeral.

- Shankar Goud, who suffered serious burns, was initially admitted to a state-run hospital in Warangal and later shifted to a super-speciality hospital in Hyderabad for advanced treatment

TSRTC employees demanded that the body be taken to Narsampet where the driver worked to pay homage. However, police did not agree, they claimed.

The leaders of the Joint Action Committee (JAC) of RTC employees are scheduled to hold talks with the committee of bureaucrats appointed by the government on Friday.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy expressed shock over the death of the employee and conveyed deep sympathies to the grieving family members, an official release said.

Attacking the Congress government over the alleged suicide of Goud, BRS MLA T Harish Rao said his party supports the strike.

BJP state president N Ramchander Rao said party leaders and workers would meet the protesting employees at the RTC depots and extend solidarity. *— PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

Fuel price hike rumour triggers panic buying in UP

LAKHIMPUR KHERI, 24 APRIL

Panic buying of petrol and diesel triggered by rumours of a price hike disrupted fuel distribution in Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri district, although stocks were adequate, officials said on Friday.

District Magistrate Anjani Kumar Singh said the rush was caused by a rumour about a possible increase in fuel prices, leading to a sudden spike in demand.

"Consumers rushed to petrol pumps in panic, which led to temporary shortage at some outlets," Singh told reporters, urging people not to believe in rumours and purchase fuel only when required.

The officials said three petrol pumps in the district went dry on Wednesday.

However, supplies were replenished by Thursday evening, and the outlets became operational again by Friday, they said.

Many petrol pumps imposed caps on fuel sales, Rs 100 to Rs 200 worth of petrol for two-wheelers and Rs 500 to Rs 1,000 worth of diesel per four-wheeler.

District supply officer (DSO) Anjani Kumar Singh said that as of Friday, 285 petrol pumps in the district had 2,141 kilolitres of diesel and 1,575 kilolitres of petrol in stock. *— PTI*

Activist brought down from BSNL tower after 560 days of stir

SAMANA, 24 APRIL

Activist Gurjeet Singh Khalsa, who had been sitting atop a 400-foot BSNL tower for approximately 560 days demanding stricter laws against sacrilege incidents in Punjab, was finally brought down on Friday morning, officials said. The dramatic protest, which began when Khalsa, 43, climbed the tower in Samana near Patiala on 120 October, 2024, ended with his rescue using a crane-lift.

After descending amid 'Sikh Jaikara' and 'Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal' chants, Khalsa was taken to hospital for a medical check-up, accompanied by supporters showering flower petals. "We have won," the activist from the Kheri Nagaian area in Patiala, said.

"By the Guru's grace, I have come down safely after 18 months and 12 days. I thank the Punjab government," Khalsa expressed gratitude to Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and Assembly Speaker Kultar Singh Sandhwan for enacting the anti-sacrilege law. *—PTI*

Gurjeet Singh Khalsa, centre, who had climbed a 400-foot BSNL tower, was brought down safely by the Patiala district administration *—PTI*

PLAINT FILED AGAINST MUMBAI WOMAN WHO CONFRONTED BJP MINISTER

MUMBAI, 24 APRIL

A complaint has been filed against a woman who confronted Maharashtra minister Girish Mahajan during a Mumbai rally, police confirmed on Friday. Zen Sadavarte, daughter of advocate Gunaratna Sadavarte, submitted the complaint on Wednesday.

The incident happened in Worli on Tuesday during a BJP rally opposing opposition parties and the defeat of the Women's Reservation Bill. The woman shouted at Mahajan, blaming him for blocking roads and causing inconvenience, asking why the rally could not be held in an open ground.

Sadavarte stated the woman created a ruckus, used abusive language, obstructed the rally, and caused public disturbance. She urged police to register a case under sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, including obstructing public servants and public mischief. Mahajan said her anger was partly justified but criticised her language. *—PTI*

KSDMA ISSUES WARNING

High UV radiation recorded in Keralam

T'PURAM, 24 APRIL

High levels of ultraviolet radiation have been recorded across Kerala in the last 24 hours, the KSDMA said on Friday.

As per data shared by the authority, UV levels above eight, warranting an orange alert, were reported at Konni in Pathanamthitta, Chengannur in Alappuzha, Changanassery in Kottayam and Munnar in Idukki.

In addition, UV levels between six and seven, corresponding to a yellow alert, were recorded at 10 locations in the state.

Prolonged exposure to UV rays can cause sunburn, skin diseases, eye problems and other health issues, the authority said.

As per the advisory of the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority, peak UV levels are usually recorded between 10 am and 3 pm, and people should avoid direct sunlight exposure during these hours.

Those engaged in outdoor work, fishermen, water transport workers, bike riders, tourists, and individuals with skin conditions, albinism, eye diseases, cancer and weakened immunity have been asked to be cautious.

The authority advised the public to use hats, umbrellas and sunglasses, and to wear full-body cotton clothing while stepping out during the day.

Women wait for food packets in the scorching heat in Thiruvananthapuram in Keralam *—PTI*

RAJASTHAN

Heatwave conditions persisted across Rajasthan, as the temperature crossed 40 degrees Celsius in most parts of the state, the meteorological centre here said on Friday, adding that Sri Ganganagar city recorded the highest 44.5 degrees Celsius.

According to the Jaipur meteorological centre, heatwave and warm night conditions were recorded at a few places across the state in the Last 24 hours. *— PTI*

India allows Maldives to draw from ₹30B aid pack

MALE, 24 APRIL

India has approved the first withdrawal from the Rs 30 billion aid package for Maldives as per its economic and financial assistance scheme, the Indian High Commission said in a statement.

The withdrawal under the 'Framework on Currency Swap Arrangement for SAARC countries,' was signed between RBI and the Maldives government during President Muizzu's visit to New Delhi in October 2024, the Indian mission said on Thursday.

The earlier USD 400 million withdrawal, availed by the Maldives under this framework in October 2024, matured on Thursday. The Maldives Foreign Ministry said on Thursday that the USD 400 million settlement reflects their government's commitment to meeting its obligations. Maldives comes under India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy. *— PTI*

- The withdrawal was made as per the 'Framework on Currency Swap Arrangement for SAARC countries'

BRIGHT MAKEOVER

Criss-cross LED lighting brightens the 185m Chord Road underpass near Magadi Road toll in Bengaluru, transforming a once dark and daunting stretch into a bright, modern visual spectacle. However, commuters say the glare can be harsh, especially at night —MOHAMMED ASAD

When oil prices spike, where does the money go?

—FREEPIK

The global nature of the oil market means that geopolitical disruptions, such as the recent conflict involving Iran, have far-reaching consequences. When supply is threatened, prices surge worldwide, affecting everything from fuel costs to the price of everyday goods.

Federal data illustrates the scale of the latest spike. At the primary crude oil hub in the United States, prices rose sharply from USD 66 per barrel in late February 2026, before the US and Israeli strikes on Iran, to USD 101 by 13 April 13. Similar increases have echoed across global markets.

As energy and international trade economists note, such developments inevitably prompt concern. Rising oil prices translate into higher costs for manufacturers, businesses and, ultimately, consumers.

FUNDAMENTALS OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Crude oil remains one of the most critical commodities in the global economy. It fuels transportation, underpins industrial production, and serves as a base for plastics, packaging and countless manufactured goods. Even fertilisers essential for food production are derived from it. Modern life, in many respects, is built on oil and its by-products.

The mechanics behind price fluctuations are straightforward. When supply tightens, competition for available oil intensifies, pushing prices higher. While markets sometimes adjust gradually, sudden disruptions—such as the closure of key shipping routes like the Strait of Hormuz—can trigger rapid and significant price spikes.

A common question arises during such periods: where does the extra money go?

In broad terms, the bulk of increased revenue flows back to the source—oil producers and companies. However, how those profits are distributed varies significantly depending on ownership structures and regulatory environments.

WEST ASIA: HIGH RISK, HIGH REWARD

Oil producers in the West Asia face heightened risks during the Iran conflict, including threats to infrastructure and shipping routes. These risks increase costs related to insurance, security and transportation.

Despite this, production costs in the region remain relatively low. As a result, higher global prices often still yield substantial profits. In countries like Saudi Arabia, where the government controls most oil production, increased revenues directly strengthen state finances and fund public spending.

US: WINDFALL GAINS IN TEXAS

Far from the geopolitical tensions of the Persian Gulf, oil producers in West Texas are experiencing a different impact. In regions such as the Permian Basin, higher global prices translate into immediate financial gains.

In the short term, revenues rise faster than operational costs, creating windfall profits. These gains typically flow to shareholders through dividends, share buybacks and debt reduction. Companies may also reinvest in expanding production capacity or infrastructure, such as pipelines, to capitalise on favourable market conditions.

NORTH SEA: SHARED BENEFITS

In the North Sea, oil production is carried out by a mix of multinational corporations and state-owned entities.

In the United Kingdom, private shareholders benefit from increased profits, although the government also captures a portion through additional taxes on oil and gas companies. These funds contribute to public spending.

Norway, by contrast, channels oil revenues into its Government Pension Fund Global, the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, valued at over USD 2 trillion. Strict rules govern withdrawals, ensuring that wealth supports both current public services and future generations. This model mirrors Alaska's state fund, which finances government services and provides annual dividends to residents.

RUSSIA: PROFITS AMID SANCTIONS

Russia's oil sector operates under heavy international sanctions imposed in response to its actions in Ukraine. While these measures aim to limit revenue, enforcement focuses on restricting services such as shipping and insurance unless oil is sold below a set price cap.

Despite these constraints, elevated global oil prices can still benefit Russia's state-controlled energy companies. Industry leadership maintains close ties to the political establishment, and much of the financial gain is believed to support the state and its military-industrial apparatus, rather than the general population.

THE CONSUMER IMPACT

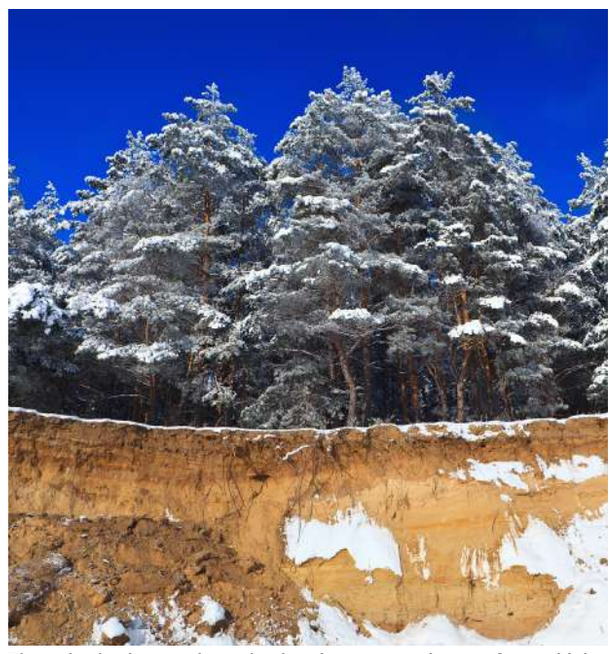
For consumers, the consequences are immediate and unavoidable. Higher oil prices increase the cost of fuel, transportation and goods across supply chains. In the short term, there is little individuals can do to avoid these effects.

However, the long-term response may be more transformative. Rising costs and recurring volatility are accelerating interest in alternative energy sources that reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

As global markets continue to react to geopolitical shocks, one reality remains clear: oil's central role in the economy ensures that its price movements are felt everywhere, from government budgets and corporate profits to household expenses. —PTI

SALAR ساہر

Snow levels fall for 4th year in Hindu Kush Himalayas



The Indus basin experienced a drop in snow persistence from a highest of 19.5% in 2020 to 24.5% below the normal level in 2024 —FREEPIK

Ganga basin is among the 12 showing above-normal snow persistence in 2026 when overall snow cover across the Hindu Kush Himalaya was below-normal for the fourth consecutive year and even broke last year's record-low deficit, a report said Friday.

The Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) Snow Update by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is an annual report that monitors seasonal snow anomalies in the HKH region and offers an assessment of snow persistence between the winter months of November and March.

Between 2003 and 2026, the HKH region experienced 14 winters with below-normal snow persistence, emerging as a recurrent pattern, particularly with increasing frequency and intensity in the recent years.

"This year, 2026, is the fourth consecutive year of below-normal snow persistence, with snow persistence declining further to 27.8 per cent below average and even breaking last year's record low deficit of 23.6 per cent," the HKH Snow Update 2026 said.

"The persistent decline signals a systemic collapse of seasonal snow reserves across the world's highest mountain range, posing an immediate and escalating threat to water security for nearly two billion people who depend on the 12 major river basins originating in the HKH," it said.

ICIMOD defines snow persistence as the fraction of time snow remains on the ground after snowfall.

Ten of those basins now have below-normal snow persistence. The Mekong, Tarim, and Tibetan Plateau have recorded their lowest levels in 24 years of monitoring, the ICIMOD report said.

Only two basins recorded above-normal snow persistence: the Ganges at plus 16.3 per cent and the Irrawaddy at plus 21.8 per cent, offering limited local relief but insufficient to offset the regional crisis.

"In contrast, extreme deficits persist in the Mekong at minus 59.5 per cent, the Tibetan Plateau at minus 47.4 per cent, and the Salween at minus 41.8 per cent," the Snow Update 2026 said.

"What we are seeing is a persistent trend where the seasonal snow reservoir is shrinking, year after year," said Sher Muhammad, author of the HKH Snow Update 2026. "The 2026 numbers confirm a breaking point: ten out of twelve basins are below normal, and several have hit their lowest recorded persistence in two decades."

Almost 240 million people depend on the glaciers and 10 major rivers, such as Indus, Ganga, and Brahmaputra, originating in the Himalayas. Another billion people living downstream of these rivers across eight countries, including India, too are dependent on the glacier-fed rivers.

In the Ganges basin, the snow persistence this year was 16.3 per cent above normal, making the number of below-normal and above-normal snow years equal over the past 24 years.

"This above-normal snow persistence may support improved early-season water availability in the basin this year. Besides the current year, the highest snow anomaly of 30.2 per cent above normal was observed in 2015," it said.

In the Brahmaputra basin, snow persistence was at the highest level of 27.7 per cent above normal in 2019 vis-à-vis the lowest level of minus 27.9 per cent below normal recorded in 2025.

"The below-normal trend in snow persistence continues even in 2026, although the level of decline is less steep in the current year, recorded at 6.1 per cent below normal.

"This continued trend of negative snow anomaly has an adverse impact on hydropower generation and agriculture, especially in early summers, and emphasises the need for integrated water resource management and drought risk planning," the report pointed out.

The Indus basin experienced a steep drop in snow persistence from a highest of 19.5 per cent in 2020 to 24.5 per cent below the normal level in 2024. It is also the lowest that the basin has faced in the past 24 years.

"The below-normal anomaly continues in 2026, too, recorded at the level of 18.1 per cent below normal. This decline is likely to exacerbate early summer water scarcity in a basin where nearly half of the runoff contributions come from meltwater. This threatens almost 300 million people and highlights the need for stronger water management strategies," the report added.

Snowmelt contributes about one-fourth of the annual runoff on an average in the 12 basins, meaning reduced snow this year will directly impact water availability for drinking, irrigation, hydropower, and ecosystem.

"This situation is particularly concerning for water supply and flood management. Reduced snowmelt will lower spring runoff and intensify water scarcity in downstream areas, especially in the western river basins," pointed out the report.

Farmers in the Indus, Helmand, and Amu Darya basins face irrigation shortfalls during early growing seasons. Hydropower operators in the Mekong, Yangtze - where the Three Gorges Dam operates - and Brahmaputra should anticipate below-normal generation in the early summer.

Compounding the crisis, consecutive low-snow years have prevented groundwater and soil moisture from replenishing, increasing vulnerability to future droughts. "Every dry spell will hit harder," warned the report. "Regional cooperation on these interconnected issues has now become urgent. We need to shift from emergency response to proactive, science-based governance," pointed out the report. —PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Govt's push for 'always-on' AI labels raises transparency concerns

- The government has proposed tightening IT Rules to mandate clear labelling of AI-generated content.
- The primary driver is the growing misuse of Artificial Intelligence. Meity believes that seemingly realistic but fake videos circulating online lead to misinformation and mislead users.
- The government has extended the deadline for stakeholders (platforms, civil society, and the public) to submit their feedback on these proposals to 7 May, 2026.

The primary driver is the growing misuse of Artificial Intelligence. Meity believes that seemingly realistic but fake videos circulating online lead to misinformation and mislead users —PTI

The government has proposed tightening of IT Rules, this time focusing specifically on how AI-generated content is identified online by users.

Here is a quick look at what the new proposal entails, why it matters, and concerns being raised by digital rights groups on the flurry of IT Rules amendments that are currently under consideration.

CORE CHANGES BEING PROPOSED

Currently, the IT Rules require "prominent visibility" of labels/markers on AI content.

The draft amendments, circulated by the Ministry of Electronics and IT (Meity) on Tuesday for public comments, seek to replace "prominent visibility" wording with "continuous and clearly visible display for labels" throughout the full duration on-screen.

Put simply, this means a watermark or label identifying the content as AI-generated cannot just appear at the beginning or end of a video; it must remain on the screen for the entire duration of the visual display.

So, no more 'now-you-see-it, now-you-don't' displays. MeitY wants to ensure that if a video is made by an AI, you, the viewer, know it from the first second to the very last.

WHY IT IS BEING DONE

The primary driver is the growing misuse of Artificial Intelligence. Meity believes that seemingly realistic but fake videos circulating online lead to misinformation and mislead users, and therefore, such content generated through AI tools needs to be marked/identified upfront.

By mandating a permanent label, the government wants to ensure that even if a viewer watches a video halfway or tunes in at any point of the clip, they are immediately aware that the content is synthetic.

Meity officials say the compliance with the previous mandate of "prominent visibility" label was not satisfactory.

Imagine a 5-minute AI-generated video that only displays a label for the first 5 seconds. If you join the video at the two-minute mark, you've missed the AI marker and might take it to be true. Officials argue an `always-on' marker is more practical. And transparent.

Social Media Intermediaries, platforms like X, YouTube, and Meta, must ensure these labels are maintained. Companies creating AI generation tools must build in these persistent labelling mechanisms, and the requirement applies to users of social media and AI tools.

The proposed "continuous label" mandate is part of a larger set of IT Rules amendments being mulled. Other proposed provisions that have emerged as major flashpoints include:

Mandatory compliance of social media platforms with IT Ministry-issued advisories. The government proposes to make it legally binding for platforms to follow clarifications, advisories, SOPs and guidelines.

Influencer regulations: The 'news and current affairs content' posted by non-publisher users (read influencers and content creators) may soon have to comply with the same legal framework as registered digital news portals.

THE PUSHBACK

Digital advocacy groups, such as the Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF), have raised several red flags:

Consultation Fatigue: The IFF argues that the government keeps adding new changes while an existing consultation is already underway, making it difficult for the public to provide structured feedback.

Ad-hoc Policy Making: Critics argue that the rules are being changed frequently without a long-term, stable roadmap.

Claims of legal overreach: IFF recently expressed concerns regarding the proposal to mandate compliance with "advisories", saying it "creates a sweeping power for Meity to issue binding instruments, which are not anchored in law".

The practical effect of the change would be a perpetual compliance threat for intermediaries, it said. Overall, IFF warned that the changes could significantly expand executive power over online speech.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The government has extended the deadline for stakeholders (platforms, civil society, and the public) to submit their feedback on these proposals to 7 May, 2026.

MeitY has stated that the feedback will be held in a fiduciary capacity, meaning the identities of those providing comments will not be disclosed, to encourage free and honest opinion. Following the consultation, the government will take a view on the final version of the amended IT Rules. —PTI

QUOTE of THE DAY

President Trump has a different way of calculating. There's two ways of calculating percentage. If you have a $600 drug and you reduce it to $10, that's a 600% reduction

—ROBERT F KENNEDY JR,
US Health Secretary

Israel, Lebanon agree to extend ceasefire: US

Israeli strikes continue; Aoun says IDF must withdraw

WASHINGTON, 24 APRIL

US President Donald Trump says Israel and Lebanon have agreed to extend a ceasefire by three weeks after talks at the White House on Thursday.

Trump says the meeting between Israel's and Lebanon's ambassadors to the US went "very well." The meeting was the second high-level negotiation between the two countries since last week. The initial 10-day ceasefire, which took effect last Friday, was due to expire Monday.

"They've agreed to an additional three weeks of, I guess, no firing. Let's see. We hope that happens. It's not going to happen between them, but we still have Hezbollah to think about," Trump told reporters at the White House.

Earlier, in a post on Truth Social, Trump said that he would host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Lebanese President Joseph Aoun soon. There was no immediate confirmation from Lebanon.

Meanwhile, speaking at an informal EU Summit in Cyprus, Auon called for Israel to withdraw its troops to behind internationally recognised borders. He said a sustainable solution must involve a halt to Israeli attacks on Lebanon and a withdrawal of troops.

Israeli soldiers currently occupy around 5 per cent of Lebanese territory. Israel has announced plans to set up a "security-zone" on Lebanese land.

Noting that around 1 million Lebanese people have been displaced since the latest war started, he condemned Israel's "continued attacks and targeting of medical teams, hospitals, educational institutions, journalists, and places of worship". He also said that Israel was "systematically destroying villages and civilian infrastructure" to prevent people from returning home.

However, Netanyahu said that "Hezbollah is trying to sabotage" the peace deal.

Despite the ceasefire, Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said that they carried out airstrikes in the Khirbet Salam and Tulin areas in southern Lebanon, claiming to target Hezbollah infrastructure after the group fired rockets at the army's position.

Meanwhile, Trump issued a 90-day extension to the Jones Act waiver, making it easier for non-American vessels to transport oil and natural gas. Trump first announced a 60-day waiver in mid-March, to help stabilise energy prices amid the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. —*Agencies*

Israeli strikes have displaced at least 1 million people in Lebanon - mostly from the south - as IDF soldiers have destroyed the people's homes and civilian infrastructure —*PTI*

Don't rush me: Trump on ending Iran war

WASHINGTON, 24 APRIL

"Don't rush me" into ending the Iran war, US President Donald Trump said on Thursday.

During an exchange with reporters in the Oval Office, he also pushed back against questions that the conflict is exceeding the four-to-six week timeline that he and aides previously set for the war.

"I took the country out militarily in the first four weeks. I took it out militarily," Trump said. "I want make the best deal I can.... Now all we're doing is sitting back and seeing what deal (we make). And if they don't want to make a deal, then I'll finish it up militarily."

While he insisted that there was no deadline for ending the ceasefire with Iran, he warned that the "clock was ticking". He had earlier extended the ceasefire "indefinitely".

Notably, European Union Foreign Policy Chief Kaja Kallas said that any potential deal struck between the sides about Iran's nuclear proliferation risks being "weaker" than the deal signed over a decade ago before Trump withdrew from it during his first term.

NO NUKES

Trump also said he's not considering using a nuclear weapon against Iran.

"Why would I use a nuclear weapon, when we've totally, in a very conventional way, decimated them without it. No, I wouldn't use it. A nuclear weapon should never be allowed to be used by anybody," he said.

This comes as CENTCOM announced that for the first time since the US' invasion of Iraq, "three aircraft carriers are operating in the Middle East at the same time. Accompanied by their carrier air wings, the USS Abraham Lincoln, USS Gerald R Ford and USS George HW Bush include over 200 aircraft and 15,000 Sailors and Marines".

It said it had turned back 34 ships to enforce the blockade of Iranian ports, even though ship tracking data showed that at least 11 tankers had passed Hormuz. —*Agencies*

Israel is... awaiting a green light from the US, to complete the elimination of the Khamenei dynasty... (and) return Iran to the age of darkness and stone by blowing up central energy and electricity facilities and crushing national economic infrastructure. This time the attack will be different and deadly and will add devastating blows in the most painful places... that will shake and collapse (Iran's) foundations

—Israel Katz, Israel Defence Minister

Don inks deal with Regeneron to lower drug prices

WASHINGTON, 24 APRIL

US President Donald Trump revealed a deal with Regeneron to reduce drug costs as part of his drug pricing initiative. The agreement involves Regeneron lowering prices on all current and future drugs for Medicaid, and selling the cholesterol medication Praluent for USD 225 on TrumpRx, the White House's discounted pharmacy website. Trump urged voters to reward Republicans in November's midterms. The deal is one of several "most-favoured-nation" agreements with drug companies. Regeneron also committed USD 27 billion to US research and manufacturing. Their gene therapy Otarmeni, for congenital hearing loss, received FDA approval. —*PTI*

Pakistan repays USD 3.45B loan to UAE

ISLAMABAD, 24 APRIL

Pakistan has repaid its entire USD 3.45 billion debt to the United Arab Emirates, confirmed the State Bank of Pakistan. The repayment was completed on Thursday, with USD 1 billion paid to the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development and USD 2.45 billion last week. The announcement follows Pakistan receiving USD 3 billion aid from Saudi Arabia in two tranches, with the second on 21 April. The UAE demanded immediate repayment amid regional tensions following the Iran war. These funds, provided in 2019, aimed to stabilise Pakistan's balance of payments. In March, Pakistan failed to secure a rollover of a USD 3.5 billion facility, raising concerns over short-term funding. —*PTI*

US sanctions Cambodian, Chinese officials

WASHINGTON, 24 APRIL

The US has launched a sweeping crackdown on cyberscam networks in Southeast Asia, targeting operations linked to organised crime. US Attorney Jeanine Pirro described the effort as a "new theatre of war" under the administration of Trump. Sanctions were imposed on Cambodian senator Kok An and others accused of running scam centres, with assets frozen and US dealings banned. Charges were also filed against Chinese nationals tied to similar operations in Myanmar. Cybercrime has surged in the region, with Americans losing nearly USD 21 billion in 2025, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. —*PTI*

Syria arrests former intel officer over 2013 massacre

DAMASCUS, 24 APRIL

Syrian authorities on Friday arrested former intelligence officer Amjad Yousef, who appeared in a 2022 leaked video allegedly showing him and others killing dozens during the conflict. He was detained in Hama, where he had been hiding, the Interior Ministry said. Since Bashar Assad's ouster in December 2024, dozens of security personnel accused of atrocities have been arrested. The conflict, which began in March 2011, has killed about 5,00,000 people and wounded over 1 million. The video purportedly shows blindfolded prisoners being shot and dumped in a trench in Tadamon, Damascus in 2013. At least 41 people were killed during the incident. —*PTI*

Iran's unity fractured enemy: Mojtaba

TEHRAN, 24 APRIL

- The Iranian Supreme Leader's comments appear to be a response to Trump, who claimed that there was "crazy" infighting in Tehran as people didn't know who their leader was

Due to the unity in Iran, "a fracture has occurred in the enemy", Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Hosseini Khamenei said on Friday, according to state media Press TV.

He called for expressing gratitude for this blessing through practical steps, saying such efforts would make national unity "greater and more steely," while leaving adversaries "more wretched and diminished."

"The enemy's media operations, by targeting the minds and psyches of the people, intend to undermine national unity and security; may our negligence not allow this sinister intent to come to fruition," he said.

Mojtaba's comments come a day after Trump claimed that there was "crazy" infighting among the "moderates" and "hardliners" in Tehran and that Iranians are "having a very hard time figuring out who their leader is".

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian earlier responded to Trump's post and said that Iranians had "One God, one nation, one leader, and one path" and were loyal to the Supreme Leader. —*ANI*

TRUMP IS AMPLIFYING RACIST TRASH: DEMOCRATS ON 'HELLHOLE' POST

WASHINGTON, 24 APRIL

Democrat leaders slammed US President Donald Trump for referring to India and some other countries as "hellholes" and accused him of turning the Presidency into a reality TV gig by amplifying "racist trash" on social media.

"Americans are struggling, and he's busy amplifying racist trash on social media," the House Foreign Affairs Committee-Democrats said on X. "This is a serious moment. Our country deserves leadership that acts like it."

Congressman Ro Khanna directed a post at Vice President JD Vance, asking "Do you also think that India is a hellhole and Chinese or Indian immigrants denigrate America?" JD Vance is married to Indian-origin Usha Vance.

Congressman Ami Bera said that the US is "a nation of immigrants, and we are stronger because of it".

On Thursday, Trump reshared a post by American radio show host Michael Savage which referred to Indians as "gangsters with laptops". —*PTI*

Spain trashes US' idea of NATO ouster

NICOSIA, 24 APRIL

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Friday refused to be drawn into a dispute with the US over reports that the Pentagon is weighing whether to punish members of NATO who fail to support American operations in the Iran war.

The Pentagon is reported to be mulling whether to suspend Spain from NATO, Reuters reported, referring to an alleged email.

"We do not work with emails," Sanchez told press at a European Union summit in Cyprus. "We work with official documents and positions taken, in this case, by the government of the US."

Spain has refused to allow US forces to use bases on its territory or airspace to strike Iran, calling saying the war was against international law. France and the UK also refuse to give US forces free rein to use their territory. Earlier reports said that the US was preparing a "naughty and nice list".

NATO sources told the BBC that there is "no provision" to expell members as the founders did not predict such a situation would arise. —*PTI*

US soldier charged for insider trading during capture of Maduro

WASHINGTON, 24 APRIL

A US special forces soldier involved in the military operation to capture Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has been charged with using classified information about the mission to win more than USD 4,00,000 on prediction market site Polymarket, federal officials announced on Thursday.

Gannon Ken Van Dyke was part of the operation to capture Maduro in January and used his access to classified information to make money on the site, the federal prosecutor's office in New York said. The 38-year-old was involved in the planning and execution of capturing Maduro for about a month.

He has been charged by the Justice Department with unlawful use of confidential government information for personal gain, theft of nonpublic government information, commodities fraud, wire fraud and making an unlawful monetary transaction. He could face years in prison.

Polymarket is one of the largest prediction markets in the world, and is often anonymous. Several US government officials, including the President himself, have been accused of using their access to insider data on sensitive matters, to make money. Even the timing of bets and Trump's post on Truth Social about the Iran war have raised bells about insider trading. —*PTI*

US says China is stealing its AI models

WASHINGTON, 24 APRIL

—FREEPIK

The US has raised concerns over what it described as large-scale efforts by foreign entities to extract capabilities from American artificial intelligence systems, according to a memorandum issued by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

In a Thursday memo, Michael Kratsios, the President's Chief Science and Technology Adviser, accused foreign entities "principally based in China" of engaging in industrial-scale campaigns to "distill", or extract capabilities from AI systems made in the US.

"Leveraging tens of thousands of proxy accounts to evade detection and using jailbreaking techniques to expose proprietary information, these coordinated campaigns systematically extract capabilities from American AI models, exploiting American expertise and innovation," the statement said. The government vowed a crackdown.

The memo warns that while such methods may not fully replicate original models, they allow entities to develop lower-cost alternatives.

This comes as the US-China gap in top AI model performance has "closed," according to a Stanford University report. —*Agencies*

ONLY 1 PERSON GOT TRUMP'S $1M GOLD CARD, SAYS LUTNICK

Trump's "gold card" visa, where a foreigner can shell out at least USD 1 million to legally live and work in the US, has been approved for one person, said Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick on Thursday. After it launched in December, Lutnick said the government sold USD 1.3 billion "worth" in just several days, but did not address the discrepancy at a committee hearing.

BUSINESSES SPEND $4 MN TO CROSS PANAMA CANAL

Businesses have doled out up as much as USD 4 million to move boats through the Panama Canal with the Strait of Hormuz effectively closed, the Panama Canal Authority stated, in a seismic shift in global trade flows. While passage through the waterway usually comes at a flat rate via reservations, companies without reservations can cross by paying an additional fee in an auction.

LAND TEMP TO INCREASE

El Nino conditions to develop in May: WMO

GENEVA, 24 APRIL

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) stated on Friday that El Nino weather conditions will likely develop strating from May, potentially affecting global temperatures and rainfall patterns. El Nino is characterised by the periodic warming of ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern Equatorial Pacific, which typically lasts 9 to 12 months.

"After a period of neutral conditions at the start of the year, there is high confidence in the onset of El Nino, followed by further intensification in the months that follow," said Wilfran Moufouma Okia, Chief of Climate Prediction at WMO.

For May–July, land temperatures are expected to be above normal worldwide, especially across southern North America, Central America, the Caribbean, Europe and North Africa, the WMO said.

As a result of the El Nino predictions, India Meteorological Department (IMD) earlier this month had said that India is likely to see below-normal monsoon this year, the first time in three years.

El Nino and La Nina are opposite phases of the El Nino-Southern Oscillation and one of the most powerful climate patterns on Earth. These events reshape global weather, influencing rainfall, drought, and extreme events across regions. —*ANI*

Pakistan kills 22 militants in KP, child dies in crossfire

PESHAWAR, 24 APRIL

A significant security operation in northwest Pakistan resulted in the deaths of 22 suspected militants during a fierce gunfight this week. Military officials confirmed the clash occurred on Tuesday when security forces and law enforcement launched a joint tactical mission near the Afghanistan border.

The operation began in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa district, where security personnel encountered armed resistance, leading to an "intense exchange of fire," according to the military media wing. The confrontation ended with 22 militants killed, a notable achievement in efforts to stabilise the border region.

Tragically, a ten-year-old child was caught in the crossfire and killed. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addressed the incident, expressing sorrow at the "martyrdom of a 10-year-old child in the unprovoked firing by the terrorists."

Pakistan's region has seen major clashes recently. —*PTI*

Rupee falls 22 paise to 94.23 against USD

MUMBAI, 24 APRIL

The rupee extended its losing streak for the fifth day in a row, depreciating 22 paise to close at 94.23 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday due to higher crude oil prices and strengthening American currency. Ship movement through the Strait of Hormuz remained uncertain, unsettling the global fuel prices, while the upheaval triggered a massive selling in domestic equity markets and outflow of foreign funds, forex analysts said.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 94.25 and stayed range-bound throughout the session, hitting the day's high of 94.18 and the low of 94.31 against the greenback. In the past five sessions, the domestic unit has lost over 1 per cent.—*PTI*

–PTI

Gold falls to Rs 1.55L/10g, silver at Rs 2.47L/kg

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Precious metal prices extended losses for the third straight session in the national capital on Friday, with gold declining Rs 200 and silver plunging Rs 3,000 amid a firm US dollar and elevated global uncertainty. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity slipped Rs 200 to Rs 1,55,900 per 10 grams from Rs 1,56,100 per 10 grams in the previous session. Silver also dropped Rs 3,000 to Rs 2,47,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). The metal had settled at Rs 2,50,000 per kg. In the international markets, spot gold rose to USD 4,708.17 per ounce, while silver gained nearly 1 per cent to USD 75.96 per ounce.—*PTI*

Investors lose Rs 7.17L cr in 3-day mkt slump

Sensex slides 999 points on Friday, down 3% in 3 days as oil hits $107 per barrel

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Investors' wealth eroded by Rs 7.17 lakh crore in three days of market fall, where the BSE Sensex tumbled over 3 per cent, as escalating tensions in West Asia, particularly around the Strait of Hormuz, have heightened fears of supply disruption, driving crude prices higher.

In three days, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 2,609.12 points or 3.29 per cent. On Friday, the Sensex dropped 999.79 points or 1.29 per cent to settle at 76,664.21. During the day, it plunged 1,260.13 points or 1.62 per cent to 76,403.87. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms eroded by Rs 7,17,476.54 crore to Rs 4,61,49,758.18 crore (USD 4.89 trillion) in three days. The primary drag on today's market came from the IT sector, where earnings disappointment and weak forward guidance triggered a broad-based sell-off, he added. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 2.17 per cent to USD 107.3 per barrel.

From the Sensex constituents, Infosys, Trent, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finance, Kotak Mahindra Bank and HDFC Bank were the winners. HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Sun Pharma, Asian Paints and ICICI Bank were also among the major laggards.

"The sharp depreciation in the Indian rupee, along with a steep rise in FII fund outflows and renewed appreciation in crude oil prices, also dented investor sentiment," Ankur Punj, MD & Business Head at Equirus Wealth, said. The BSE SmallCap Select index dropped 0.95 per cent, and the MidCap Select index dipped 0.91 per cent. All sectoral indices ended lower.

A rise in foreign fund outflows and rising crude proces dented investors' sentiments –*PTI*

- The primary drag came from the IT sector, where earnings disappointment and weak forward guidance triggered a broad-based sell-off. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 2.17 per cent to USD 107.3

The BSE IT tanked 5.13 per cent, BSE Focused IT (4.65 per cent), healthcare (1.35 per cent), telecommunication (1.33 per cent), realty (1.30 per cent) and services (1.7 per cent). A total of 2,905 stocks declined, while 1,326 advanced and 158 remained unchanged on the BSE during the session. —*PTI*

AT RS 1,154.45

Infosys' market value declined to Rs 4,68,201.44 crore –*PTI*

Infosys shares fall 7% after Q4 results

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Shares of IT major Infosys on Friday slumped 7 per cent after its revenue growth forecast for FY27 came in lower than market expectations.

The stock declined 7.09 per cent to settle at Rs 1,154.45 on the BSE. During the day, it dropped 7.26 per cent to hit a 52-week low of Rs 1,152.35. At the NSE, the stock tanked 6.93 per cent to Rs 1,154.60.

The company's market valuation declined by Rs 35,746.38 crore to Rs 4,68,201.44 crore.

JM Financial Institutional Securities Limited said in a report that Infosys guided for 1.5 per cent-3.5 per cent YoY cc revenue growth for FY27 (includes 20-25bps of acquisition), lower than the expected 2 to 4 per cent; margin guidance was in-line at 20-22 per cent.

Infosys on 23 April reported a 20.8 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 8,501 crore in the January-March quarter and guided for 1.5 to 3.5 per cent revenue growth for FY27, pinning its optimism on momentum in financial services, utilities, and AI services.

The top management spoke of the calendar year starting on a strong note, but pointed out that there was a "change in economic environment" amid the West Asia conflict.

The company's revenue from operations increased 13.4 per cent to Rs 46,402 crore in Q4. In FY26, Infosys' net profit climbed 10.20 per cent to Rs 29,440 crore. Its revenue from operations rose 9.6 per cent to Rs 1,78,650 crore.

For FY27, Infosys predicts a revenue growth of 1.5 to 3.5 per cent. —*PTI*

Adani Green Q4 profit rises 34% to Rs 514 crore

Adani Green Energy Ltd on Friday posted a 34 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 514 crore in the March quarter (Q4), driven by higher revenues from the power supply business. Key drivers included advanced renewable energy technologies, high plant performance, and new sites in Khavda, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. Energy sales grew by 34 per cent YoY in this financial year (FY26). While total income increased to Rs 13,819 crore from Rs 12,422 crore in FY25. However, consolidated net profit declined to Rs 1,987 crore from Rs 2,001 crore in the previous year. —*PTI*

Reliance Q4 profit falls 12.5 % as energy crisis hits core biz

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Reliance Industries Limited on Friday reported a 12.5 per cent decline in its March-quarter net profit, as the global energy crisis weighed on its core oil-to-chemicals business, offsetting gains in its consumer-facing telecom and retail segments.

Its net profit of Rs 16,971 crore in the January-March - the fourth and final quarter of 2025-26 fiscal year - was down from Rs 19,407 crore in the same period a year earlier, according to a company statement. The profit also declined sequentially from Rs 18,645 crore recorded in the October-December 2025 quarter.

The oil-to-chemicals (O2C) business, which contributes the lion's share of revenue to Reliance, was impacted by the war in West Asia.

The government's reintroduction of a windfall tax on fuel exports further weighed on margins, while the company was compelled to divert valuable feedstock from petrochemical production towards manufacturing LPG to help manage domestic energy disruptions.

The total income, however, rose to Rs 3.03 lakh crore in Q4, compared to Rs 2.69 lakh crore a year ago.

For FY26, the company posted a record net profit of Rs 80,775 crore, marking a 16 per cent increase from Rs 69,648 crore in FY25.

EBITDA came in at Rs 48,588 crore in Q4, almost the same as last year.

Depreciation was up 10 per cent at Rs 14,808 crore, largely on account of higher depreciation in digital services from network assets. Also, finance costs increased 7 per cent to Rs 6,585 crore, mainly due to operationalisation of 5G spectrum assets. For FY 26 Reliance posted record high revenue of Rs 11.75 lakh crore and an all-time high EBITDA of Rs 2.07 lakh crore.

Its telecom and digital arm, Jio Platforms, posted a 13 per cent rise in profit in Q4. In retail, profit rose to Rs 3,563 crore as it opened 333 new stores.

RIL chairman and managing director Mukesh Ambani highlighted strong performance in the digital and retail segments. —*PTI*

JP MORGAN, HSBC CUT INDIA RATINGS ON OIL CONCERNS

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Two global brokerages have downgraded India amid rising oil prices and supply-side disruptions, flagging near-term headwinds for equities even as they retain confidence in the country's structural growth trajectory.

JP Morgan downgraded Indian equities to 'neutral' from 'overweight', citing a combination of valuation concerns, earnings risks and limited exposure to emerging technology themes.

Its latest Asia strategy report the brokerage pointed to ongoing equity issuance, stating that "aggressive promoter stake sales and record capital issuance... cap upside potential," thereby diluting returns for existing investors.

Separately, HSBC downgraded India to 'underweight' from 'Neutral', citing macroeconomic vulnerabilities linked to energy dependence and inflation risks. —*ANI*

Government to formulate laws on seed, pesticide

LUCKNOW, 24 APRIL

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday said laws related to seeds and pesticides are nearly ready and are likely to be tabled in the next session of Parliament for passage.

Addressing a regional agriculture conference for northern states here, Chouhan said the proposed Seed Act and Pesticide Act have been circulated for feedback and aim to curb the sale of spurious and substandard inputs.

The minister said if anyone supplies fake or poor-quality seeds or pesticides, stringent action will be taken. The existing penalties are too low and ineffective,he said, adding that a nationwide campaign against such malpractices would be launched with support from states.

Action will be taken against those selling fake seeds and pesticides –*PTI*

The conference was attended by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, state Agriculture Minister Surya Pratap Shahi, Horticulture Minister Dinesh Singh and representatives from nine states.

Chouhan said that the Centre has shifted from a single national conference on rabi and kharif crops to region-specific consultations to better address diverse agro-climatic conditions across the country.]

Highlighting achievements, the minister said India's foodgrain stocks are sufficient and the country is no longer dependent on imports. —*ANI*

Govt to launch barrier-free tolls soon

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Seamless, barrier-free tolling on several national highways across the country will be implemented by December, road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari said on Friday.

Addressing the second edition of Logistics Shakti Summit & Awards 2026, Gadkari said India will have to develop good infrastructure to reduce logistics cost.

This new system facilitates barrier-free tolling using integrated technologies, including Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) with AI analytics and RFID-based Electronic Toll Collection (FASTag).

Under this, vehicles will be charged based on their identification through high-performance ANPR cameras and FASTag readers, without needing to stop at toll plazas.

In case of non-compliance, e-notices will be served to violators, non-payment of which may result in suspension of FASTag and other VAHAN-related penalties.

Gadkari noted that if India wants to become a global power, the country will have to reduce logistics cost to single digits. —*PTI*

Int'l gateways to be blocked to curb telecom fraud

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Measures to curb telecom fraud, including blocking at international gateways and better information sharing among operators, are being actively examined, Union Minister of State for Communications Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani said on the sidelines of the COAI DigiCom Summit 2026 in Delhi.

Highlighting the need for coordinated action across telecom service providers (TSPs), Pemmasani said, "e-KYC, information sharing... if one TSP does an effective intervention, it should translate quickly to other TSPs...."

He added that multiple mechanisms are being explored to strengthen fraud detection and prevention systems.

He cautioned against misuse of emerging technologies. The government will examine these issues through its digital intelligence systems. —*ANI*

Banks must build defences against AI threats: Nirmala

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said Indian banks must adopt a more versatile and proactive approach to counter emerging artificial intelligence-driven cyber threats.

The minister's remarks came at a post-inaugural press conference after the launch of the new State Bank of India office in Pune,

Her remarks followed a high-level meeting held on Thursday with Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw, along with RBI, NPCI, CERT-In and chiefs of Scheduled Commercial Banks, to assess risks from advanced AI models.

Sitharaman said that the Ministry of Electronics and Telecommunications is actively engaging with global governments and technology companies to gauge the evolving risk landscape and India's preparedness.

She urged banks to bring in the best available cybersecurity professionals and specialised agencies to strengthen defensive and monitoring capabilities, and to immediately report any suspicious activity to CERT-In and other authorities. A robust real-time threat intelligence sharing mechanism among banks, CERT-In and other agencies was also advised to ensure early detection and quick dissemination of emerging threats.

Banks were directed to work together under a coordinated institutional mechanism led by the Indian Banks' Association. SBI Chairman, will lead the effort.

The banks will assess where more investments are needed, what technologies can be adopted and how AI can be used to counter AI-based threats, she said. She said the Terms of Reference for the banking sector's 2047 roadmap are broad to allow the committee to recommend the structure and scale of banks needed for the future. —*PTI*

OUTPERFORMS GEMINI, CHATGPT

After a yr, DeepSeek unveils new model

HONG KONG, 24 APRIL

DeepSeek, the Chinese artificial intelligence startup that shook world markets last year, launched preview versions of its latest major update Friday as the AI rivalry between China and the US heats up.

DeepSeek's V4 has been keenly anticipated by users keen to test how it compares to US competitors like OpenAI's ChatGPT, Anthropic's Claude and Google's Gemini.

Anthropic and OpenAI have accused DeepSeek of unfairly building its technology off their own.

Some industry analysts had expected the new model to arrive more than a month earlier at the start of the Lunar New Year.

DeepSeek says the new V4 open-source models, which include 'pro' and 'flash' versions, have big improvements in knowledge, reasoning and in their 'agentic' capabilities – the ability to perform complex tasks and workflows autonomously.

The new models have big improvements in knowledge and reasonin–*FREEPIK*

In terms of 'agentic' capabilities, the Chinese company said the V4 'pro' version could outperform Claude's Sonnet 4.5 and approaches the level of Claude's Opus 4.5 model based on its own evaluation.

V4 is a successor to V3, an AI model that DeepSeek released in late 2024.

But it was DeepSeek's specialized 'reasoning' AI model, called R1, that took markets by surprise with its release in January 2025. DeepSeek claimed it was more cost-effective than OpenAI's similar model.

This week, Michael Kratsios, chief science and technology adviser to the US President, also accused foreign tech companies 'principally based in China' of distilling leading US AI systems and 'exploiting American expertise and innovation.'

China's embassy in US hit back at the allegations, describing them as 'unjustified' suppression of Chinese companies by the US. —*PTI*

OpenAI launches smarter, faster ChatGPT 5.5

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

OpenAI on Thursday unveiled GPT-5.5, calling it its smartest and most intuitive model yet and claimed that it is the next step toward letting AI actually do the work.

Unlike earlier versions that needed careful step-by-step instructions, GPT-5.5 can take on messy, multi-part tasks from start to finish, the company said. The new version can plan, use tools, check its own work, navigate ambiguity and keep going on a project until it's done. The model excels at writing and debugging code, researching online, analyzing data, building documents and spreadsheets, and even operating software across different apps.

The company said the biggest leap is in agentic coding and computer. On Terminal-Bench 2.0, which tests complex command-line workflows requiring planning and tool coordination, GPT-5.5 hits 82.7 per cent accuracy. On SWE-Bench Pro, it scores 58.6 per cent, solving more tasks end-to-end in a single pass than previous models. GPT-5.5 delivers frontier-level intelligence at roughly half the cost of competing models.

GPT-5.5 was co-designed and served on NVIDIA GB200 and GB300 NVL72 systems, with Codex helping engineers test and optimize the stack itself.

GPT-5.5 behaves more like a capable assistant than a chatbot. OpenAI's own teams are using it across finance, comms, marketing and product. —*ANI*

DC face an uphill task against unbeaten PBKS

Inconsistent batting by Rahul troubles Delhi

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

–PTI

Delhi Capitals will have to play out of their skins to get their stuttering campaign back on track when they face high-flying Punjab Kings in the Indian Premier League here on Saturday.

It will be a daunting task for the struggling Delhi outfit smarting from a comprehensive 47-run defeat to Sunrisers Hyderabad to stand up to a Punjab side that has been firing on all cylinders this season.

With three wins and as many losses from six matches, the Capitals find themselves pushed down the bottom half of the table in sixth place. In contrast, Punjab Kings remain the only unbeaten team in the competition so far, sitting pretty at the top of the standings with 11 points from six outings. The sole point they lost was due to their game being washed out against the Kolkata Knight Riders at Eden Gardens.

Delhi's biggest concern has been its inconsistent batting. While the likes of KL Rahul, David Miller, Tristan Stubbs and Sameer Rizvi have all contributed in patches, the unit has failed to click collectively.

Opener Pathum Nissanka, despite getting starts, has been unable to convert them into substantial scores, leaving the middle order with too much to do.

Captain Axar Patel, too, would want to shoulder greater responsibility with the bat. The all-rounder is also under scrutiny for some questionable tactical calls in the previous game.

No panic over DC batting, insists Stubbs

Delhi Capitals batter Tristan Stubbs downplayed concerns around the team's batting, saying their performances have appeared "worse" largely because they have been chasing in every match this season, but admitted they are yet to produce a "perfect" innings.

The Capitals, who have three wins and as many losses from six matches, are yet to set a target in the tournament, a factor Stubbs believes has shaped the perception around their batting performances.

All three defeats have come while pursuing targets in excess of 200, exposing their vulnerability in high-pressure chases. DC failed to cross the 200-run mark in two of those, losing to Chennai Super Kings by 23 runs and Sunrisers Hyderabad by 47 runs. The match starts at 3.30 pm. —*PTI*

RR look to make home advantage against SRH

Revenge could be on Rajasthan Royals' mind

JAIPUR, 24 APRIL

–PTI

Rajasthan Royals would want to assert their dominance at home and settle old scores when they host Sunrisers Hyderabad in what promises to be a high-stakes Indian Premier League game here on Saturday, with both sides eyeing crucial points.

Revenge could be on RR's mind, having been outplayed by SRH in their first-leg match on April 13, when Praful Hinge headlined a 57-run drubbing with a performance that has become part of IPL lore now.

RR have since then done well, including notching a 40-run win over Lucknow SuperGiants away on Wednesday, and are currently placed second in the pecking order.

SRH, who have already had their share of ups and downs this season due to inconsistency, are occupying the fourth spot, and they know the home team will come at them all guns blazing at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium.

Whether it was controlling the start, the middle overs, or closing out at the death, RR were found wanting in almost every department in the most recent meeting between the two sides, and they will see this fixture as the perfect opportunity to come up with a befitting response, especially in phases where they faltered last time.

There is no doubt that there is a clear subplot of unfinished business in the game as far as RR are concerned, even as SRH bank on their attacking top-order batters to fire and set the tone for the visitors.

Sangakkara is not losing sleep over Parag's poor form

Rajasthan Royals captain Riyan Parag might be going through one of his leanest spells as a batter in the Indian Premier League. The 24-year-old has struggled so far in IPL 2026, managing just 81 runs from seven innings.

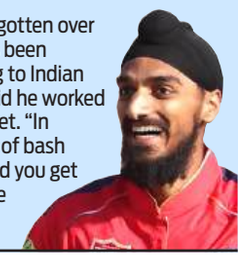
Royals' coach Kumar Sangakkara, though, isn't losing sleep over Parag's batting form.

"When you're batting well, sometimes you don't always score. I would have been concerned if he wasn't hitting the ball well. I think he's hitting it really well. He just needs to stitch together a few more runs so that he sets himself a good platform to attack in the end," said Sangakkara. Match starts: 7.30 pm. —*PTI*

Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh hail Samson's hundred

Spin legends Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh hailed Sanju Samson's hundred against the Mumbai Indians here as one of the finest in terms of game awareness and context, as the Chennai Super Kings returned to winning ways in the ongoing IPL. Sanju Samson scored his second century of the 2026 IPL season on Thursday, smashing an unbeaten 101 off 54 balls at Wankhede Stadium. Speaking on Star Sports, Kumble stressed the knock's impact on CSK, who are trying to climb up the points table after a string of poor outings. "CSK's success has often been built on strong starts from their openers, and in the last few seasons, that hasn't been consistent. Sanju Samson has stepped up in that context, two unbeaten hundreds in just seven matches, and has been instrumental in carrying the team through," the great leg-spinner observed.

Bartlett hails Arshdeep's influence in adapting to IPL conditions



Punjab Kings pacer Xavier Bartlett has hailed teammate Arshdeep Singh's influence as "amazing", crediting the India seamer's experience for helping him adapt to Indian conditions in the ongoing IPL. Bartlett, who has featured in Punjab Kings' rotation this season, has picked up 4 wickets in IPL 2026, with best figures of 2/9 as he continues to find his feet in a varied pace attack alongside Arshdeep. "Arshdeep has been incredible...He's had so much experience in these conditions, and has been someone I've loved working with," Bartlett told PTI Videos. "Not just in games but in training as well. Seeing how hard he works and how much better he's gotten over the last 12 months has been amazing." On adapting to Indian conditions, Bartlett said he worked on expanding his skillset. "In Australia, you can sort of bash away at the length, and you get a little bit of assistance from the wicket.

–PTI

'India has shown interest in hosting 2038 Asian Games'

NEW DELHI, 24 APRIL

India has officially submitted its expression of interest to host the 2038 Asian Games, a top official of the national Olympic body said, marking a significant step in the country's broader strategy to become a global hub for major multi-sporting events. The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) has recently submitted its Expression of Interest (EOI) to host the 2038 Games to the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA). The continental Olympic body discussed India's EOI at its executive board meeting on April 21 in the Chinese city of Sanya, where the Asian Beach Games began on 22 April. "Yes, we have submitted an EOI, and it was discussed by the OCA in its executive board meeting," IOA CEO Raghuram Iyer told PTI on Friday.—*PTI*

–PTI

Anush Agarwalla claims silver at CDI Hagen

HAGEN, 24 APRIL

Indian equestrian Anush Agarwalla delivered an outstanding performance at the CDI Hagen, one of Europe's most esteemed international dressage competitions, securing a second-place finish with a score of 70.94 per cent aboard his accomplished mare, Floriana, in Hagen, Germany. The result marks another landmark achievement in the young Indian rider's rapidly ascending international career. Agarwalla and Floriana produced a polished and expressive test that impressed the panel of international judges. The pair's harmony, technical precision, and artistic presentation earned them a score of 70.94 per cent, placing them firmly on the podium in second position.I'm really pleased with how Floriana and I performed at Hagen.—*PTI*

BCB WITHDRAWS MUSTAFIZUR'S NOC FOR PSL

CHATTOGRAM, 24 APRIL

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has withdrawn the No Objection Certificate (NOC) issued to pacer Mustafizur Rahman for the Pakistan Super League 2026, following a medical review after the third ODI against New Zealand.

According to a BCB statement, Mustafizur will undergo an immediate scan to assess his condition. He will then begin a rehabilitation programme under the supervision of the board's medical team, ruling him out of the remainder of this season's PSL.

"The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) wishes to inform that, following the conclusion of the 3rd ODI against New Zealand, the team's medical staff has reviewed the condition of national team pace bowler Mustafizur Rahman," the BCB said on Thursday in a statement. "It has been decided that the player will undergo an immediate scan to further assess his condition, after which he will commence a rehabilitation programme under the supervision of the BCB Medical Team. "In this regard, the Board has withdrawn the No Objection Certificate (NOC) previously issued to Mustafizur. He will therefore not be available to participate in the remainder of PSL 2026," it added. —*PTI*

India seek to salvage pride against SA in fourth women's T20I

JOHANNESBURG, 28 JAN

–PTI

The series is lost. However, India will still have a lot to play for in the fourth Women's T20I against South Africa here on Saturday, including salvaging pride, restoring rhythm, and setting the tone for what lies ahead in the World Cup year. Hosts South Africa have already taken an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match rubber and are aiming for a clean sweep to continue their unbeaten streak at home, even as the Indians seek to bring to an end a series of disappointing performances despite possessing a team that is full of quality players, including a few superstars of the modern women's game.

With the T20 World Cup scheduled later this year in England, the Indians will not be low on motivation as they look to plug the gaps heading into the mega event, less than a year after winning their maiden ICC title in the form of the ODI World Cup.

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, who believes that the reverses in the last few days will allow the team management sufficient time to address their shortcomings and "come back strong" for the T20 World Cup in June, will be expecting to see a more complete performance on Saturday. —*PTI*

Shambhavi and Divyanshu clinch mixed team air rifle gold

CAIRO, 24 APRIL

–PTI

Shooters Shambhavi Kshirsagar and Divyanshu Dewangan clinched the 10m air rifle mixed team gold with a world record score of 499.9 as India claimed its fourth gold in the ISSF Junior World Cup here on Friday.

The pair had earlier topped the qualification round with a combined 632.0.

Chinese Taipei's Tsai Chieh-Ying and Chen You-An won silver with 498.3, while the French pairing of Tifenn Pomes and Gaspard Lesieur won bronze with 434.4.

India now has 12 medals from the Cairo Junior World Cup and leads the medal tally with four gold, five silver, and three bronze medals, with two days of the competition left and six gold medals to be decided.

In the 25m rapid-fire pistol men junior event, Sameer made the finals cut with an effort of 573 in qualifying, which gave him second spot.

France's Arnaud Gamaleri posted a table-topping 589, which equaled the junior world record.

Sameer finished seventh eventually, scoring seven hits in the first three five-shot series of the eight-series final. Gamaleri took gold with 29 hits. —*PTI*

WORLD CUP FINAL TICKETS GO ON SALE FOR $2.3M EACH

NEW YORK, 24 APRIL

FIFA's resale site has four tickets on sale for the World Cup final for just under $2.3m each.

The $2,299,998.85 seats for the 19 July match at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey are located behind a goal in the lower deck of the arena.

FIFA does not control the asking prices on its Resale/Exchange Marketplace but takes a 15% purchase fee from the buyer of each ticket and a 15% resale fee from the seller. That means FIFA would make $690,000 if one of the tickets for the final sold at $2.3m on resale.

Another seat for the final in the lower deck, listed as easy access standard, was on sale at $207,000. —*AGENCIES*

Indian U-18 ice hockey team set to compete in Asia Cup

BISHKEK, 24 APRIL

Indian ice hockey team –*PTI*

The Gurtej Singh Bhatti-led Indian ice hockey team will compete in the U-18 Asia Cup in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, from 27 April to 3 May, the national federation announced on Friday.

Apart from India, hosts Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, and Macau, China will compete in the tournament.

Devansh Sharma and Iftiqar Hussain will be India's alternate captains. In 2025, the Indian women's team won a bronze medal at the IIHF Women's Asia Cup in Al Ain, UAE, securing the country's first international medal in the sport. The men's team had earlier claimed silver at the 2017 IIHF Challenge Cup of Asia Division I, and more recently represented India at the 2025 Asian Winter Games in Harbin, China.

The last year was a big one for Indian ice hockey. It created real momentum around the sport. Now the U-18 boys have their opportunity, and that makes this a very exciting moment for us. "The fact that this team has players from different states shows the game is growing, and the IIHF U-18 Asia Cup gives them the kind of exposure that can shape the future. —*PTI*

THOMAS CUP 2026

India beat Canada 4-1 in Final opener

HORSENS, 24 APRIL

Ayush Shetty defeated Canada's Brian Yang 21-13, 21-17 –*PTI*

Lakshya Sen –*PTI*

Lakshya Sen endured a tough loss, but Ayush Shetty and the doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty registered wins as 2022 champions India notched up a commanding 4-1 win over Canada in their opening Group A tie of the Thomas Cup Finals, here Friday.

However, there was disappointment in store in the women's section as India lost 2-3 to hosts Denmark in their opening Group A tie of the Uber Cup Finals.

After Lakshya's spirited effort ended in an 18-21, 21-19, 21-10 loss to world No. 13 Victor Lai, world No. 4 Satwik and Chirag levelled the tie with a dominant 21-10, 21-11 win over Jonathan Bing Tsan Lai and Kevin Lee. The 20-year-old Ayush, runner-up at the recent Asia Championships, then outwitted world No. 33 Brian Yang 21-13, 21-17 in 39 minutes to hand India a 2-1 lead.

The second doubles pair of Hariharan Amsakarunan and M R Arjun sealed the tie for India with a convincing 21-7, 21-15 victory over Ty Alexander Lindeman and Nyl Yakura. Kidambi Srikanth then outsmarted world No. 77 Joshua Nguyen 21-17, 21-12 in the inconsequential fifth match as India wrapped up the match 4-1 to be placed second in the table behind China.

China, 11-time winners and defending champions, beat Australia 5-0. The top two teams from each of the four groups will qualify for the quarter-finals. "Really happy with the way we played today... Although we were down 0-1, we're happy that we could get a point for the team and make it 1-0. "We don't want to keep so many expectations; we just want to enjoy as much as possible. It's a long tournament. —*PTI*

Italy says will not replace Iran in WC

ROME, 24 APRIL

Italian sports officials say four-time champion Italy is not interested in replacing Iran at the upcoming World Cup following a suggestion to that effect by a Trump administration official.

Iran has not withdrawn from the World Cup, and the team is preparing to play in the U.S. despite the war in the Middle East. FIFA has insisted its group stage games near Los Angeles and in Seattle will go ahead as planned in June.

The Financial Times reported that Paolo Zampolli, the U.S. special envoy for global partnerships, had suggested the swap to President Donald Trump and FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

In a phone interview with the Associated Press on Thursday, Zampolli emphasized that "my request is not a political request."

The ask, which was made to Trump and Infantino on Wednesday, was meant as a contingency plan in case Iran could not participate in the soccer tournament at the last minute. —*AGENCIES*